Feather Confusion
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For Your Eyes Only
OPERATION STATUS:
WORLD DOMINATION BEGINS 1-18-07
VIPERA'S SHOPPING
MINIONS 401K
ANNUAL SUMMARY
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BARONENGELUS

Further Confusion 2007

FUR YOUR EYES ONLY

18–22 January 2007

Doubletree Hotel
San Jose, California

www.furtherconfusion.org

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TOP SECRET
FOR STAFF ONLY ACCESS

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Good morning, Mr. Phelps.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to have an exceptional time at Further Confusion 2007. . . .

On behalf of the convention staff and myself, I want to thank you for coming out to attend Further Confusion 2007: Fur Your Eyes Only. Without your attendance, Further Confusion would not occur. Thank you for your continuing support.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the convention staff for the many countless hours and effort they have committed to the convention throughout this past year.

As in every year past, Further Confusion elects two charitable organizations to which the convention will donate a portion of the year's proceeds. It is my honor to introduce to you the recipients of this year's convention proceeds. Our first charity, Stanislaus Wildlife Center, is a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation center located near Modesto, CA which is dedicated to helping native California wildlife survive in an increasingly urban environment.

Our second charity is the Golden State California Greyhound Adoption, a non-profit organization which helps place retired racing greyhounds into loving homes. Both charities do admirable work and are deserving of this year's charitable nominations.

Without further ado, please enjoy your time at the convention.

Sincerely yours,.
Squirrel, Chairwoman
Van, Vice-Chair

. . . This program book will self-destruct in ten seconds. . . .

P.S.: Defective program books that fail to explode are the responsibility of the user. By reading this text, you absolve Further Confusion from all liability for their use. Books that do explode will be replaced once the user kills three supervillians (imprisonment does not count), purchases an underwater submarine car, converts at least one primary henchman to the cause of Deity and Country, provides cryptographic translation of the member rosters of at least two previously unknown criminal organizations, and wags their tail three times widdershins.

ATTENDEE CODE OF CONDUCT

Further Confusion strives to give as many people as possible a fun time. Most of the convention is for general audiences (PG-13 or less). We will mark clearly the few areas and events which may exceed a general-audience rating. At registration you may choose to sign an age statement stating that you are 18 years of age or older. If you choose not to sign this statement, or are not 18 years of age or older, your badge will be marked and you will be allowed admittance only to those areas or events that are for a general audience. Please be prepared to show your badge at any time you need access to convention space or events—it identifies you as a fully-paid attendee of the convention.

Further Confusion likes to hold itself out as a professional convention. We also hope that each attendee enjoys the fun that our wide-ranging community can provide. Please consider how your actions reflect on the convention and how they may impact or affect others. We take pride in our appearance and we want you to as well, whilst still having fun. To this effect, if the convention becomes aware of any of our attendees engaging in illegal activities, either in convention space or in private hotel rooms, we will be forced to inform the proper authorities.

Although this year we are consuming all of the function space at the hotel, keep in mind that there are always other guests of the hotel, especially on the first floor and lobby areas. Offending the hotel's other guests is inappropriate. Impressing them with how much fun and enthusiasm we have for our fandom *is* appropriate. What you consider to be acceptable behavior may not be so for others. Consideration of others is the hallmark of a mature individual and a healthy fandom. We encourage that courtesy from all participants in our community.

Safety and security matters are generally handled by FLARE, who are a group of experienced individuals used by Further Confusion and other conventions. FLARE can be contacted through Convention Operations (see below) or by asking any of the convention staff. FLARE may ask you to stop an activity or to move it to a private room. Repeat offenders may even be required to return their badges and to leave the convention premises. We ask our attendees always to comply with FLARE's requests promptly. If you feel that FLARE has made an unfair request, or has not dealt with you in an fair manner, you may bring this up at a later time with the convention chair or vice-chair.

COSTUMES AND CLOTHING

Use your common sense in public areas. If you have to ask or think twice about doing it in public, take it to your room. For example, kissing and holding hands, regardless of sexual orientation, are fine. Groping, tongue battles, and nudity, regardless of sexual orientation, are not. While collars and leashes may be worn discreetly, blatant displays of bondage or BDSM in public may result in FLARE asking you to return your badge. No costume is no costume: We ask you to wear at least a shirt, shorts, and shoes in public areas of the hotel.

Body painters should always keep shirts handy at all times in case they need to pass through the lobby or other areas that the hotel's other guests might frequent. Additionally, if you are wearing body paint of any kind, please refrain from sitting on hotel furniture. Similarly, the lobby and hotel furniture is *not* the proper place for decorating someone as a tiger. We have a Creator's Lounge that may be used for impromptu makeup demonstrations. Public exposure of genitalia, buttocks or (female) breasts is not permitted. As a rule, a minimum of a non-thong bathing suit must be worn at all times in public areas. "Anatomically correct" costumes must be likewise clothed.

HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

No means *no*. Stop means *stop*. Go away means *go away*. If someone won't understand these simple rules, contact a member of FLARE. They have the right to remove an attendee's badge for not following these commands. Harassment is any behavior that intentionally annoys or alarms another person. This includes unwanted physical contact, following someone in a public area without a legitimate reason, or threatening physical violence. Offenders may lose their badges and the matter may be referred to the proper law enforcement authorities. If you are being harassed, immediately contact FLARE, through a nearby staff member or by phoning Convention

Operations from any hotel phone and asking for FLARE. Convention Operations' phone number is in the pocket program or you can dial 0 and ask for Further Confusion Convention Operations.

BUYING AND SELLING

Further Confusion has two main areas where merchandise and services are sold—the Dealer's Room and the Furry Market Place. Anyone who receives payment for goods or services (such as body painting, massage, etc.) in convention space must comply with all the conventions rules regarding this. The Dealer's Room Rules apply in this situation, regardless of the location, and vendors must ensure they have proper California Sales Tax IDs.

If anyone wishes to request payment for goods or services and to donate the proceeds to charity, Further Confusion must be informed of this ahead of time to allow for the convention to organize the correct tax reporting.

Further Confusion takes very seriously its legal obligations in this area. Any solicitation for payment at the convention that does not comply with these obligations may result in the offender losing their badge and being required to return all payments.

PARTIES, ALCOHOL, & ZERO DRUG TOLERANCE

Further Confusion does not tolerate serving of alcohol to minors. If you are hosting a party where alcohol is being served, it is your responsibility as host to ensure that the age of anyone drinking alcohol is checked. You should also designate someone not to drink, so that there is a fully competent person present to deal with any emergencies that might arise.

Further Confusion *does not* tolerate the use of illegal substances. The violation of the above rules could subject you to the immediate loss of your badge and convention privileges and referral of the matter to other authorities.

WATER PISTOLS, SILLY STRING, AND WEAPONS

Due to the potential damage to property, water guns, silly string and the like are prohibited in public areas of the hotel or convention space.

If it looks like a real gun in any way, shape, or form, it should not be brought to the convention. The State of California has recently instituted new state laws regarding replica weapons.

There should be no "live" steel or whips being wielded in any area of the convention. If a bladed weapon or whip is part of your costume, please have it peace-bonded. This can be done at the FLARE Base at any time. If you kill it, you have to eat it!

PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOTAPE

Further Confusion wants you to have great memories from a fantastic convention. Photographs and videotape footage by attendees are generally allowed in all common areas of the convention with the exception of the Art Show. Specific rules regarding these matters may exist for selected events. Please consult the program guide at the convention for information relating to specific events. Flash photography will be allowed at the Masquerade.

When photographing or videotaping individuals or costumes, please use common courtesy and ask before photographing them. Please respect their rights if they do not wish to be photographed or videotaped. If someone asks or otherwise indicates (remember many folks in costume do not speak) that they do not wish to be photographed, *do not photograph them*!

Photography or videography for the purpose of sale or publication to the press is expressly forbidden unless written permission has been obtained from AAE, Inc. in accordance with its press policy. Individuals may take pictures and videotapes for private viewing or sharing with friends. We ask our attendees to be courteous to those they wish to take pictures of, especially if you wish to place those pictures or video clips onto a personal Web page or similar Internet archive. In this case, please ask your subjects for their explicit permission to do this.

Attendees should be aware that footage gathered by staff members in public areas of the convention, including events and panels, may be used in a highlights tape and that attendees may appear in that tape without compensation. As mentioned above, please consult the pocket program guide for specific video, audio, and photography restrictions for specific events. Further Confusion will require a release only for footage that is obtained in areas

ATTENDEE CODE OF CONDUCT

that are not fully public (i.e., private functions and personal interviews).

These rules apply to all attendees (dealers, guests, or any level of regular membership). All members of the press and staff will conform to Further Confusion's press policy and we encourage attendees to become familiar with those rules as well.

IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE

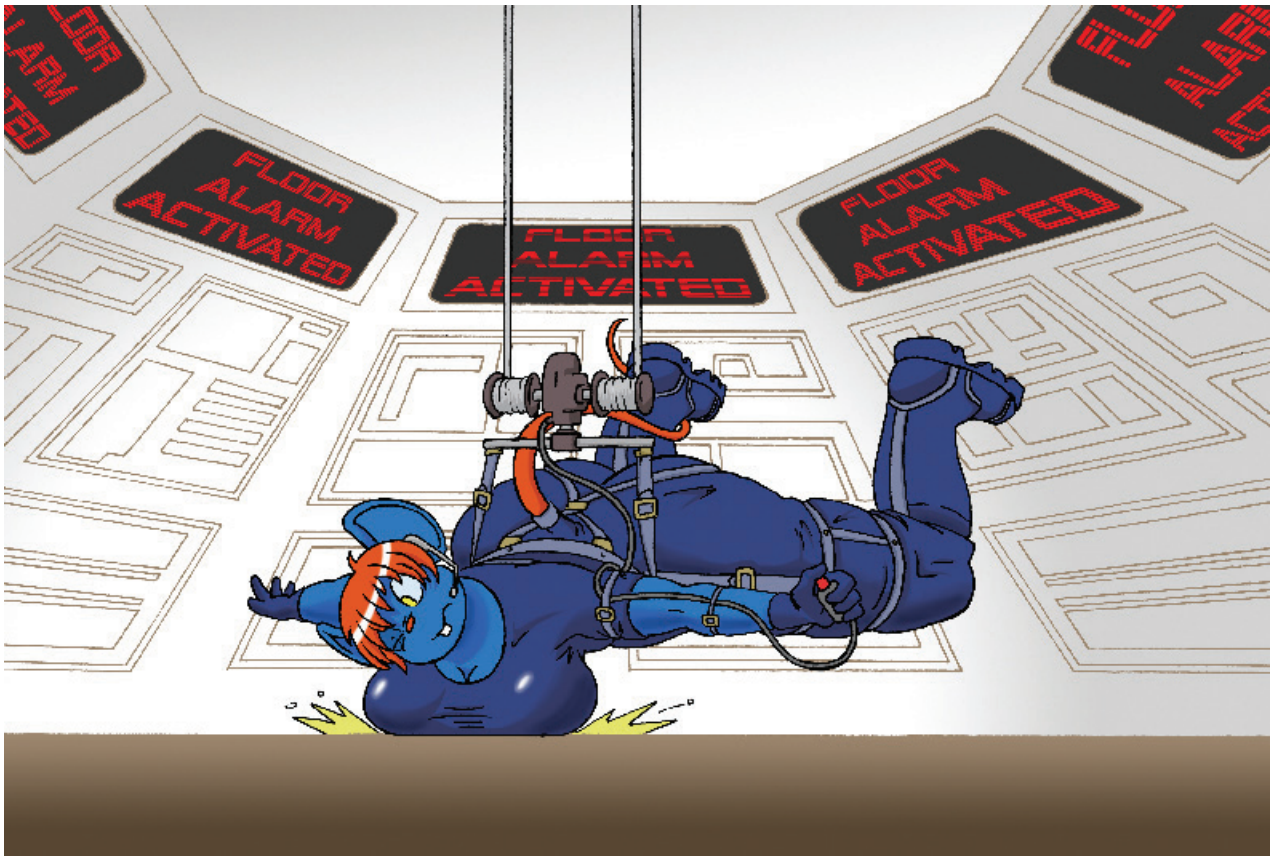
Further Confusion has a Convention Operations room, which is staffed night and day throughout the convention. One of their roles is to assist you if you have any problems whilst at the convention. You can find their location and phone number in the pocket program, or you can dial 0 on any internal hotel phone and ask for Further Confusion Convention Operations; they will be happy to help you in any way they can. Remember, we cannot address a problem unless we know about it.

If Convention Operations cannot assist you directly, they will have someone contact you who should be able to. For less urgent matters messages may be left with Convention Operations to be forwarded to executive staff, although it is not usually possible to pass messages on to non-executive staff. As with all messages left with Con Ops, please remember to give details of how, when, and where the recipient can contact you.

Further Confusion has a large staff to handle most aspects of the running of the convention. This allows the Chair and Vice Chair to remain available to talk about any comments or concerns that our attendees bring to them. If you see them around the corridors, feel free to speak to them—even if they appear harried, ensuring our attendees have a good time is one of their primary roles! If you need to contact the convention chair or vice-chair at any other time, you can do this by leaving a message for them at Convention Operations.

HAVE A FUN AND SAFE CONVENTION!

If you have any questions or comments regarding Further Confusion policies, please send email to *info@furtherconfusion.org.*



SLY
VS
SLY

GUEST OF HONOR: JERRY POURNELLE, PH.D.

Jerry E. Pournelle, Ph.D., earned his bachelors in psychology and mathematics, his masters in experimental statistics and systems engineering, and his doctorates in psychology and political science, all from the University of Washington.

An excellent SF author, he's also a noted lecturer, consultant and computer columnist (senior consulting editor at *BYTE Magazine*) and chairs the Citizen's Advisory Council on National Space Policy and The Lunar Society, Inc. He has served as Advisor on Space Policy to the Republican Congressional Leadership and as a board member of the L-5 Society.

A Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, British Interplanetary Society, Royal Astronomical Society and the Operations Research Society of America, he is also a senior member of the American Astronautical Society and the American Institute of Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineers. He has served as a past president of the Science Fiction Writers of America and as science editor for *Twin Circle Magazine* and *Galaxy SF,* and as a columnist for *Analog Science Fiction* and *Infoworld Magazine.* His other writing associations include membership in the Author's Guild, the National Association of Science Writers, and the Aviation/Space Writers' Association.

With Larry Niven, he's written the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Footfall,* widely considered one of the best novels of alien invasion ever written, and *The Mote in God's Eye,* now in forty-five US printings and among the very best first-contact novels ever written, *Lucifer's Hammer,* probably the best "here-comes-a-big-comet-kaboom!" novel ever written, *The Gripping Hand, Fallen Angels, Oath of Fealty* (set in a giant arcology), and *Inferno,* a retelling of Dante's classic tale.

His other novels and science-fact works include *A Step Farther Out, Adventures in Microland, Prince of Sparta, The Endless Frontier, King David's Spaceship, The Mercenary, A Spaceship for the King, West of Honor, Birth of Fire, High Justice, Janissaries, Clan and Crown: Janissaries II, Storms of Victory: Janissaries III, Prince of Mercenaries, Falkenberg's Legion, Go Tell the Spartans,* and *Strategy of Technology.* With Larry Niven and Steven Barnes, he wrote *Beowulf's Children* and *The Legacy of Heorot.*

Jerry created and edits the bestselling essay and fiction series *There Will Be War* and *Imperial Stars.* He was the first winner of the John W. Campbell Award in 1974 and won the Evans-Freehafer Award in 1977, plus both the "Forrie" and the Inkpot Award (Comic Arts Professional Society) in 1979. He's had over a dozen nominations for Nebula and Hugo Awards. He was nominated for TABA in 1980, was Toastmaster at Westercon in 1979, and remains a frequent guest of honor and toastmaster at science fiction, literary, and computer conventions.

Jerry was one of the first authors to use a computer for writing both fiction and non-fiction (see "Writing With Computers" in *Computing Magazine* way back in the summer of 1979). A conservationist and author of numerous articles on interaction of technology with conservation, he remains a staunch advocate of technology as a means of preserving both humanity and nature.

He is a Knight Commander, Military and Hospitaler Order of St. George in Karinthia and a Commander of the Knights of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem; other affiliations include the Noble Company of the Rose, Companion with Star, Orthodox Order of Hospitalers, and he's a Fellow in the Augustan Society. He served as Knight-Marshal of the West, Society for Creative Anachronism, 1972–1976 and on the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society (LASFS) from 1978 to 1985.

Jerry's first personal computer, EZEKIEL, is on display in the Museum of American History, History of Computing and Communications exhibit, at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. He was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, but now lives in Studio City, California. Married in 1959 to Roberta Jane née Isdell, he has four sons and one daughter.

GUEST OF HONOR: BARON ENGEL

Baron's been drawing since the age of eighteen . . . months, that is. His first anthropomorphic art resulted from an art school class assignment requiring deliberate distortions of the human figure. His instructor, impressed by the comparatively vivid and engaging results, encouraged ("do you want a good grade in this class?") an initially reluctant Baron to continue developing this style, and by the end of the semester, he was hooked. At college, majoring in commercial illustration, he encountered science fiction literature and art and set his sights on making his living in that genre—putting him on a collision course with anthropomorphic fandom.

In 1989, Baron was still unaware anyone else was interested in that sort of thing. But while looking for reference material, he was advised to seek out the Society for Creative Anachronism. At one of the meetings, he came to the attention of last year's Further Confusion Artist GOH, Eric Elliott, who (at the top of his lungs) singled Baron out as a furry artist! The rest, as they say, is history, and Baron's been involved in the fandom ever since.

Along with his anthropomorphic art Baron has worked in the commercial market, comics, and the entertainment inudstries as a concept designer. He and Christina "Smudge" Hanson founded Backbreaker Studios LLC in 1997 and since then have conducted numerous demonstrations and panels for art groups and conventions. His pieces have been exhibited at local museums—winning several awards—and thirty to forty conventions a year in the US and abroad.

Baron's hobbies include cooking, history, paleontology, astronomy, wildlife, reading, aviation, lucid dreaming, shooting, anime and comics, and mechanical thingies. Examples of his work can be seen on the Web at *backbreaker.com*.

SPECIAL GUESTS: SUB-LEVEL 03

In 2000, John Williams and Lennox Gonzalez discovered they shared a passion for expressionistic music. Since the band's inception the two have drawn on their individual past musical accomplishments and experiments to give Sub-Level 03 its unique flavor and broad style.

The unyielding support of family and friends encouraged them to market an album and eventually led to their first public appearance in 2003. Bolstered by the success of their début performance at a small venue just outside Oklahoma City, the band decided to play publicly on a much larger scale.

The Pink Revolution Tour kicked off in early 2005 with the first stop in Atlanta, Georgia. This successful tour concluded with a bang in Rocket City—Huntsville, Alabama—in 2006. After experiencing the good, the bad, and sometimes the ugly of a national tour bringing the band from coast-to-coast, the stars were ready for change. Lennox and John have now completed three albums, a DVD with several music videos, radio spots, a live album, and much more.

The Fallout radiates forth this September, 2006, kicking off in Memphis, Tennessee. Upcoming projects include a multi-artist collaboration album, a tribute cover recording album, and a fresh new merchandise line to accent an album that will further propel the band to mainstream with a darker soul.

While the projects to date could be considered a reflection of the band's collective lifetime of experience, the direction they are currently headed will reflect the dynamic changes they now face. Watch out for the Fallout as there is no telling what to expect.

LENNOX

My interest in music started way back in the early '80s; I still lived in Venezuela at the time. Van Halen's "Jump" was the first song that I can remember listening to and saying, "Wow, I want to be able to play drums like that." I always wanted a drum set, but never had the financing that is required to own such an instrument. So I resorted to air drumming. I could play that song backward and forward with my eyes shut.

JOHN

My interest in music extends back to my childhood. Even as a child I was interested in synthesizers and electronic music and the machines that enable an artist to create those tones and timbres. I have been with Sub-level 03 four years as the keyboardist and studio engineer.

THE 5 O'CLOCK

Shadow

A PROJECT DESTINY STUDIOS PUBLICATION
TWICE A MONTH
January 18th 1937
10 CENTS

THE SCRITCH OF DEATH complete novel

and other furry mystery stories

EVENTS

GUESTS OF HONOR

Meet the Guests Come see all of Further Confusion '07's guests in one place!

Kaffeeklatch: Jerry Pournelle A chance to meet our Writer Guest of Honor in a small group session.

Kaffeeklatch: Baron Engel A chance to meet our Artist Guest of Honor in a small group session.

Kaffeeklatch: Sub-Level 03 A chance to meet the band in a small group session.

BOX OFFICE

Trailer Park Watch the newest movie trailers and get a glimpse of what's to come soon in the theaters.

Hiss and Purr

EXEC/AAE

AAE Annual Board Meeting Every year, the board of directors holds its annual meeting. This meeting is open to the public, and anyone interested in the workings of the parent corporation of Further Confusion is welcome to attend.

OTHER STUFF

Opening Ceremonies Come see Further Confusion '07 begin!

Mad Scientists Sure you like the hero, but everyone really enjoys reading about their foes—the wilder and crazier the better. How does someone decide to become a mad scientist? Where do the ideas for their death traps and weapons come from? Come hear a lively discussion.

Artists' Draw Bag In a world of artists, art is the real currency. In this raffle the entry fee is your art. Winners get to choose from our gallery of submissions as well as from other prizes. We will be exchanging art for raffle tickets as soon as the Creator's Lounge opens. The drawing will be held on Sunday at 10 PM, right after Furry Night Live. Work in keeping with this year's theme is highly recommended.

Coffee, Tea, and Memes We had a blast doing it last year and had a very good turnout by the fans. They asked intelligent questions and provided their own useful input during the evening.

Sub-Level 03 Sub-Level 03 talks about music and various aspects of performing and entertaining.

FC 2008 Staff Job Fair Have you ever wanted to work on a convention? Sure, there's some work involved, but it's also a ton of fun! Come to this panel and volunteer to get involved with Further Confusion 2008 at the very beginning.

What the Fluff?! So you think this group of improvisers is competitively performing a show for you based on your suggestions? What the fluff?!

SOCIAL TRACK

Sub-Level 03 Concert and Dance Come hear the sounds of our special musical guests as they energize the night!

Potoroo's Live Performance Live acoustic musical performance by Potoroo.

The Metal & Punk Show Thalyi & Twitch present "The Metal & Punk Show".

Listen to Kigs Talk Kigs returns this year with another ninety minutes of comedy.

Thursday-Night Dance Come hang out with us at the Thursday-Night Dance, featuring our talented furry DJs.

Fursuit Dance Come shake your tail with us as our DJs present the best of '80s and '90s dance! Suiters and non-suiters welcome! And afterward, stick around for our Friday-night electronic dance, featuring some of the best electronic dance music from the fandom's most talented vinyl DJs.

Saturday-Night Dance After Sub-Level 03, stick around for our Saturday-night electronic dance! Our DJs will keep you dancing until the wee morning hours.

Sunday-Night Dance Come hang out with us at the Sunday-Night Dance, featuring our talented furry DJs.

Al Ferrari For the first and possibly last time at any fur convention, the Man in Black, MIB, takes the stage and anything else that's not nailed down (so hide your valuables). Sunday night MIB, aka the Nighthorse, goes off his medication and takes you on a long, strange trip from being a mundane to a furry. Fursuiters are especially welcome to come and possibly end up being part of the show!

Masquerade Come show your costume to FC attendees. Costumes will be judged on construction and looks, and judging is open to all levels of experience. You *must* attend the rehearsal earlier in the day to take part in the show. Attend even if you don't want to be judged and just want to show your new suit off.

Masquerade Rehearsal If you want to be in the Masquerade, bring your costume ready to be judged. We will be registering and judging costumes. Rehearsal is mandatory in order to participate in the Masquerade.

Furry Night Live (show) Furry Night Live: the Sunday-night stage show featuring an assortment of acts our comedy writers have assembled as well as the best the fandom has to offer. The audience-chosen winning acts will receive cash awards.

Furry Night Live First Rehearsal Furry Night Live first rehearsal. A working audition, the staff will review the acts being performed and critique, assist, and work with the performers for the benefit of the show. Additionally, we will accept applications from acts outside the scope of the Masquerade.

Furry Night Live Orientation Furry Night Live (formerly the Furry Variety Show) required orientation meeting for those who wish to perform but who have not contacted the lead/director/producer in advance nor who have filled out a participation form. This is the introductory panel where we will distribute forms and meet with skit folks who need actors and actors who need skits.

Meetup for Fursuit Parade Any costumers wishing to participate in the fursuit parade should meet here to get ready to march!

Furry Night Live Final Rehearsal Furry Night Live (formerly known as the Furry Variety Show) final dress rehearsal. Attendance is limited to participants only.

Fursuit Airbrush Techniques Lance Ikegawa and Eric Yee, masters at airbrushing fur, will demonstrate their techniques firsthand. Tips, tricks, and materials will be discussed in this panel.

Animatronics Through Radio Control Have you ever wanted an animatronic fursuit but were put off by expensive computer systems and hours of programming? Come check out a different way to bring that next hall-walk performance to life. With the use of RC transmitters and off-the-shelf hardware you can animate eyes, blinks, and ears, and even waggle your tail—and still be as spontaneous as you want! Topics covered include choosing a radio and discussion of installation procedures. Hosted by Kitt Foxx and Treads Lightly.

The Mascot Movie *The Mascot Movie* is an entertaining look into the trials and tribulations of performing as a mascot. This independent film opened in Canadian theaters in late 2005 and has run the film-fest circuit. Now be amongst the first in the US to view a movie that was partially filmed at FC2004. Come join us for sweat, fur, and fun.

Critterlympics VI Join the fun as the Critterlympics return for the sixth spectacular year! Fursuited athletes from all over will battle to decide who is the best of the furry best, hosted once again by Penh Gwyn.

Animatronics for Fursuits Take fursuiting up a new notches wth animatronics! Fast becoming very popular fursuit accessories, animatronics can truly bring your fursuit to life! WolfTail will show you how easy it is to add a little life to your next suit!

Masquerade Final Rehearsal Come early, make space for yourself, rest up for the show. All entrants must arrive thirty minutes prior to showtime for last-minute announcements.

Fiberglass Head Construction This panel is all about how to create a fiberglass head and the advantages and drawbacks of this method. If you want an animatronic suit, it's pretty much a requirement to use fiberglass, and it's good for regular heads as well. This panel shows the materials needed and how to bring your idea to life using this increasingly popular method.

FURSUIT TRACK

Professional Mascots and Fursuits Many dream of making a living at fursuiting, or at least making a little extra money at it. What is it like to actually have a professional gig? This panel will talk about what is involved with going pro, from how to get started to what it's actually like. Come hear experiences from a professional mascot performer on what it's like to go pro. Hosted by Oz Kangaroo.

Basic Head Construction Wanting to build that perfect head for your fursuit? This panel will help get you started, from design to building. The focus here will be on foam and plastic mesh construction. Attend this panel and learn tips and ideas for making your ideal head a reality.

Fursuit Performance Okay, so you have that shiny new fursuit, but now what to do with it? Come and get tips from experienced suiters on how to do more than just smile and wave in suit, and really bring your character to life.

The Nuts and Bolts of Fursuiting This panel is designed mainly for beginners, but experienced suiters are welcome as well. In this panel, we'll discuss the logistics of fursuiting, from what to carry your suit in to needed items to take with you for every appearance. We'll also cover tips on how to safely travel with your suit, to get it there intact, and dealing with airline issues.

Fursuit Roundtable The traditional meet and greet for fursuiters. Come and meet your fellow suiters in a nice relaxed environment.

Bodysuit Construction This panel will cover how to make a basic bodysuit for your fursuit, showing a couple of methods and ways to make it fit you. If you're ready to tackle making your own suit, this is the panel for you.

Fursuit Detailing You've built or bought a new fursuit, but it needs something more. Maybe nicer eyes, maybe a better nose. This panel will cover adding the details, things like noses, eyes, claws, and the like. Come and learn methods for really making your suit stand out.

Advanced Costume Construction Lance Ikegawa of LX, Ltd. will discuss some techniques he uses in creating his costumes from both an artistic and technical point of view. Working with exotic materials, such as NFT fur, will also be discussed.

SPECIES TRACK

Aquatic Furs Mermaids and selkies, krakens and willie, aquatic animals and their mythic counterparts have played a large part in the fantastic for millennia. Come discuss the real and the fantastic and how the two become blurred in the deep blue sea.

Avians From the Raven that made the world to the hawkmen of Ming and beyond, birds have populated our fiction. Come learn about some real-life counterparts of fictional birds and discuss your favorites.

Hyenas Everyone knows what a hyena is, right? They're doglike, goofball scavengers who don't mind adding fresh meat to their diet. Real hyaenids, though, are a small but diverse group of carnivores far more complex than just a stereotype of spotted hyenas . . . and they're more similar to meerkats than to dogs. Tune in to find out what makes hyenas so unique!

Canines The noble wolf, the cunning coyote, the loyal dog—all of these are stereotypes that furry fans know, love, and emulate. Come check out what it means to be a canine fan in the furry fandom.

Wolves, Wolf Recovery and Hybrids Wolves are among the most common animal personalities represented in the furry fandom. Hear about these magnificent creatures from furries who make wolves their life's work. We invite you to join us as we discuss the nature of these very social animals whose behavior sometimes more closely parallels our own than any other animal. We will also discuss the current goings-on of wolf recovery efforts in the US and the dangers of cross-breeding wolves with other canines.

Dragons and Scalies Reptiles, including dragons and dinosaurs, are regular denizens of our fiction. Come learn and share information about their history and their non-fictional and fictional lives.

Felines Come learn about and discuss felines both in life and in the fandom. Learn real feline behavior and how it relates to characters as well as how much animal should be included in how a feline character behaves. Discourse and open discussion, audience members encouraged to participate!

Fox Panel Mysterious and sly, foxes have fascinated people and filled our myths since before grapes first became sour. Kitsune, fox, or fox fan, come for an interesting time.

Marsupials Marsupials—not just cute koalas or charismatic kangaroos. Come learn about the other kinds, including the carnivourous marsupials of Australia. Want to know more about the thylacine? How about ones you may never have heard of, like the long extinct thylacoleo, or the tiny antichinus? We might just sneak something in about those mischievous monotremes as well.

Mustelids One of the most ancient families of living mammals, these weasels are united by fur and fury. From Asian small-clawed otters to zorillas. If you love weasels and their kin, come here to discuss your favorite furbearers.

MIB—Minotaurs in Black Minotaur, Tauren, bovids of all persuasions, and anyone else interested, your mission is to come to this panel and debrief . . . er, discuss and debate all aspects of the bovine underground. At conclusion, your picture will be taken with the newest of digital "cameras"; just look at the flashing red light. . . .

Rodents Small guys don't get much respect. But rats, mice, and pikas have adapted to their environments and have a distinct place of their own both in the food chain and in favorite literature. Discuss why we chose rodents as our furry personae, as well as popular rodent furry references in movies, cartoons, books, and video games.

Lounging with Lagomorphs (Rabbits and Hares) We all know about rabbits—or do we? For an animal so common and celebrated in story and myth, it is astounding how little most people know about their basic biology and behavior. Learn about how rabbits are like horses. Find out why they can breed like bunnies. How do people see and interact with them, myth and reality. And what happens when they come out of the hutch and into your home. There will be bunnies to draw and photograph.

Ungulates Everything you ever wanted to know but didn't know you needed to ask. We will discuss the taxonomy and basic anatomy of ungulate species as well as their influence on man and role-playing.

Dragons (adults only) Please come and join your host for the Masquerade and Furry Night Live, Kiteless Dragon, to explore and talk about the sexual aspects of being a dragon and/or liking (loving) dragons. Online or offline, in reality or dreams, books and short stories. Come and share your thoughts and fantasies, or maybe discover something you had not thought of. Panel is for attendees eighteen and older.

Animal Totems Your totem animals: What are they? How do you discover them? Wolves and foxes are all trendy, so how do you know? We don't guarantee that you'll discover your totem animals, but you might learn some ways to find out who they are.

Kzinti Panel A trenchcoat is probably not going to fool the enemy during a war between different species. How was espionage conducted during the Man-Kzin Wars? Dr. Jerry E. Pournelle, Ph.D., computing expert and author of *The Children's Hour,* and Matthew Joseph Harrington, author of "Teacher's Pet", have given examples in their work and invite discussion.

Hybrid Furs Calling all hybrids! Calling all hybrids! The Hybrid Panel summons you! If you are tired of panels for those "plain" species, this is the place for you! Are you a cross-breed of something fun like a wolf and a tiger? Are you a mixture of something outrageous like a dragon and a penguin? Or maybe you're something just plain weird, such as a spider-hippo! Whether you were created from evil experiments or DNA splicing or popped out of nowhere, this is the place to meet others like you in ways never thought possible! Come see people and species never seen before! All are welcome, hybrids and friends alike!

SCIENCE TRACK

Fox Hunt Introduction Radio tracking fans, try your hand at hunting down our foxes this year. Yappy will be bringing a small "fox" transmitter, hidden somewhere on site for you all to track down. This panel will introduce you to our fox hunt this year.

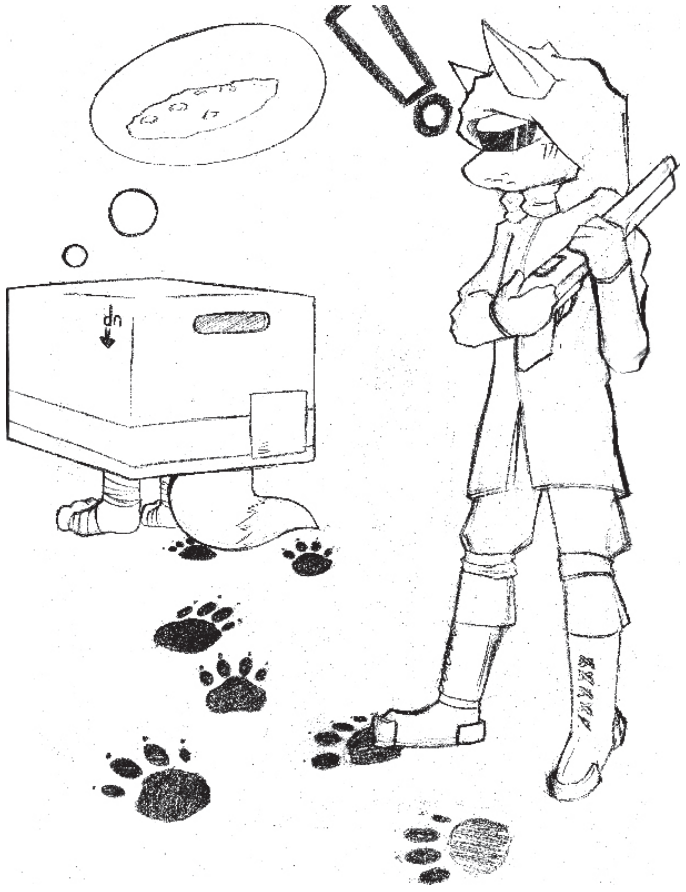
Camouflage in Nature Concealment is important whether you're predator or prey. Camouflage is more than just patchy coloration on fabric. Come see and talk about ways animals hide from each other and a bit about how this affects furry costuming and art.

Skulls, Feathers, and Furs, Oh My! Taxidermy and the furry fandom may seem an odd marriage but an ever-growing number of artists and fans are collecting animal skulls, bones, and hides, and for a variety of reasons. At this panel you will learn why this hobby is growing in popularity and how you can start your own collection. You will discover how to find or buy "dead things" legally and ways to acquire skulls and furs without funding the hunting and trapping industries. You'll also learn how to clean and preserve your collection and how to handle problems taxidermy collectors sometimes encounter. Led by a knowledgeable collector with years of experience, this panel will offer something for everyone, whether you're a serious collector or are just curious what it's all about!

Live Animal Event (Wildlife Companions) Live animals: Wildlife Companions is a non-profit organization that operates a sanctuary and endangered species education outreach program. More information on this organization can be found on their Web site, *www.wildlifecompanions.org*.

Golden State Greyhound Adoption Welcome to the wonderful world of greyhounds! Not the greyhound bred for show but rather the greyhound bred for racing—and therein lies the difference. Your greyhound is a member of one of the most ancient and prestigious breeds of purebred dogs known to man. This is one of the oldest and most noble breeds of dog. Greyhounds can trace their ancestry back over four thousand years to the time of ancient Egypt, Persia and Greece, and are in fact the only breed of dog mentioned in the Bible (Proverbs 30:29–31). In ancient Egypt, greyhounds were mummified and buried along with their owners, who had their tombs decorated with greyhound figures. The greyhound has appeared in art and literature throughout history. Greyhounds have long been associated with royalty, a favorite of nobility from pharaohs and Arabian sheiks to the kings and princes of Europe. For many years, only those of royal birth were permitted the honor of owning a greyhound. Golden State California Greyhound Adoption is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization dedicated to maximizing greyhound rescue and greyhound adoption of retired racing greyhounds in Northern California and particularly around the San Francisco Bay Area. By educating the public on the plight of the retired racing greyhound, we find great homes for these loving companions. Visit our Web site at *http://www.goldengreyhounds.com/*.

Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center One of our charities this year, Stanislaus Wildlife Care Center, will give a presentation on their mission and activities and may well bring some of the animals under their care with them.



Espionage in a Furry World In a world where there might be multiple species or magic, how do people protect themselves from the unwanted attention of governments, organizations, or individuals? Likewise how can one gather data on one's foes? This panel gives a very brief history of espionage and then focuses on how it might work in other worlds.

Cryptography This panel provides an introduction to the science of cryptography. Topics discussed will include the history of ciphers, how ciphers work (with examples such as Vinegere or Playfair), and how cryptography is used in your life.

Spy Numbers Stations Shortwave numbers stations have been in use for close to a century. Though their true purpose is unclear, it's believed these radio oddities are used as an effective, low-tech, and anonymous way to communicate with agents in the field. If you're a radio enthusiast and you've ever tuned in something you just can't explain, or if you have an interest in cryptography, then this panel is for you.

Furry Ham Radio Calling all radio furs! Come put faces to those call signs, trade old war stories, ask those burning questions, and have a good time! You need not be a ham to join us, but the jokes will be funnier if you are one.

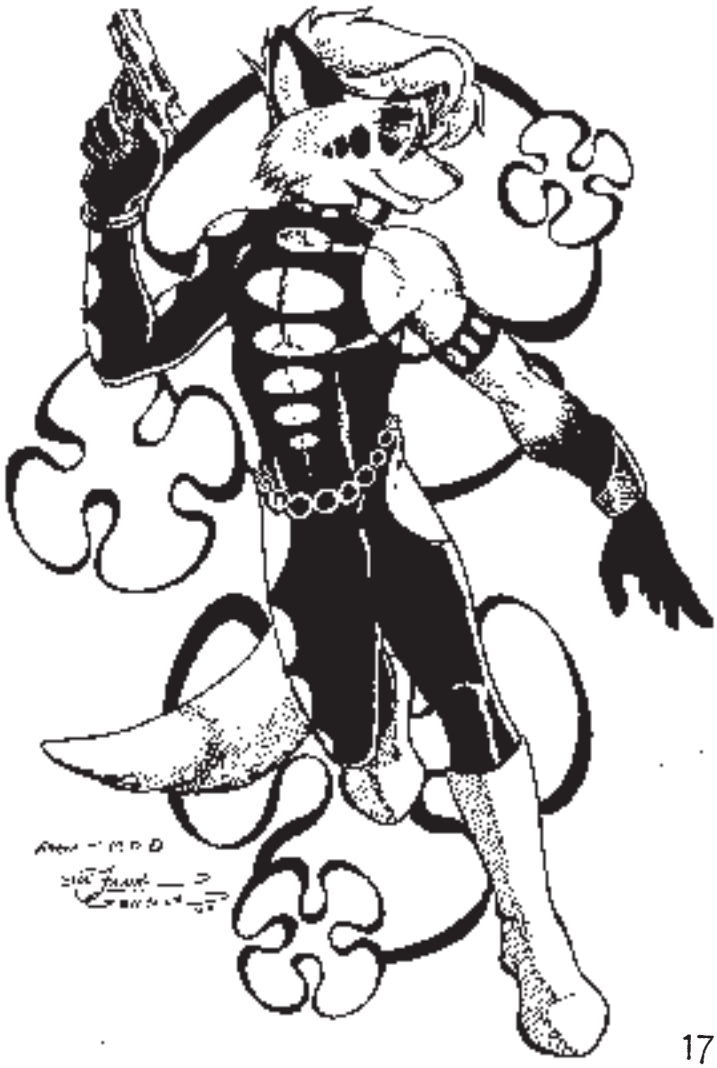
Second Life Come and learn what Second Life is all about. Second Life is an online world that blends the flexibility of old-time MUCKs with elegant 3-D graphics, creating a world where one can be anything one wants to be. Panelists will discuss a range of issues, including anecdotes from Second Life, joining and getting started, things to do and see, and the technology of Second Life. We also welcome furs who are already part of Second Life to join us to share stories and images from the game.

Going Online for New Furs Going online can be a rewarding experience, but people often don't know where to go or how to present their online personae. It can also be treacherous, given the proliferation of email spoofing, adware, and spyware. This panel discusses such issues as interesting Web sites and email lists for furs, how to communicate effectively online, what to watch out for, and tools that you can use.

Data Security This panel introduces cryptography as a means of protecting data, with a discussion of such subjects as signatures and encryption (or why Johnny can't encrypt), securing wireless links, and smart cards.

Using the Computer as an Artistic Tool Computers can be used to aid in the creation of both static and animated artwork. This panel discusses what makes a computer better or worse than paper, what hardware and software tools an artist should have to help them, and how to get started using these tools.

Satellite Surveillance These days the sky is literally peppered with satellites. NASA's public database for tracking satellites (*http://science.nasa.gov/Realtime/jtrack/3d/JTrack3D.html*) alone has over nine hundred satellites available to track. Many of these are used to watch the Earth in various ways. Come and learn what some of these are and how they affect your life.



ART TRACK

Colored Pencils In a lecture-workshop discussion, Baron Engel will present his somewhat unique technique of using color pencils while giving the audience a chance to get hands-on practice.

The Spark of Life Sometimes you can get everything right in figure drawing—but the character still looks as stiff as a department-store mannequin. This panel will help provide some insight on how to make your figures look as if they will jump up and move around the page.

Iron Artist Master Artist Seurat once again will don his coat and challenge the best of the best of furry artists to a duel to settle who is the best around.

Gathering Intelligence Any good agent in the field has to be able to find and gather information about his work in order to be effective. But how does one actually go about this process? How do you look up how that particular species looks in the wild, or the details of its environment? Top operatives in the field will discuss means through which you can do research on subjects and, thusly armed, complete your artistic missions.

Concealment: Working With Your Background Unless you're a polar bear in a snowstorm, in most cases an agent in the field will stand out rather starkly from his environment. Take tips and tricks from top agents on providing background cover and integrating the subject into it during your artistic missions.

Anatomy in Art Every good spy should know how to do that knockout chop to the side of the neck, right? Take tips from master-at-arms operative Eric Elliot on how to draw the anatomy of your characters, and through drawing learn that secret spot!

Color in Art This will be a basic class in color theory focusing on the following topics: Aspects of color (hue, saturation, brightness), light sources, use of colors based upon conditions, use of various tools (marker, pencil, paint, digital), display of techniques.

SPIRITUALITY TRACK

Flight Capabilities Sometimes one has to call in an aerialist to get a field mission done. In these cases, we turned to the winged folks. Amber Hill will give a tutorial on wings, both in construction and implementation in use with an anthropomorphic character, focusing on aesthetics.

ArtSpots Jam Session The ArtSpots Jam is a place to meet, greet, draw with, and collaborate with those artists you know from online—offline and for the first time at FC. Collaborate on impromptu compositions, the type that if you have been around long enough you remember from cons past. Participate in impromptu games such as ambushes or "Until . . ." Exchange ideas for future projects and possible art-world domination, including a panel to discuss the future of anthropomorphic art in the "real" world.

SPIRITUALITY

Animal Voices For many, animals play a large role in their day-to-day lives; whether as companions or pets or as wildlife, they are lucky enough to get close to animals on a regular basis. How do our daily interactions with these creatures bring us closer to our spiritual sides? How can we get even closer to those animals as we live our lives?

The Furry Paradigm What does Furry mean to you? Is it a beneficial set of memes? Is it a lens of viewing the world around you? In this open discussion, tell us how you live your life as a furry. Come prepared to listen respectfully.

Wolf Spirituality A presentation by the director of the Wolf Ranch Foundation for those of you who hear Wolf's footsteps or would like to know more about wolves in spirituality.

WRITING TRACK

Jerry Pournelle Reading Jerry Pournelle reads from some of his most recent works. There will be an autograph session following this panel.

The Eye of Argon It's back! Come read a line or two from the notorious "worst story ever written". Act out your favorite parts! Participation mandatory!

Inspiration and Brainstorming Ever get stumped for an idea? Got a great idea but don't know where to go with it? We'll discuss ways of getting inspiration and give you some exercises for overcoming the dreaded curse of writer's block.

Thursday Night Writers' Jam: Furries on a Vehicle! Furry on a Vehicle! You've seen *Snakes on a Plane*! Now make the sequel! This fast-paced round-robin writing event will get your creative juices flowing. Stories will be posted.

Literary Furries Furries and animals play an important part in many works of literature. Come discuss your favorites and what their impact was on the work and other works of literature as well.

Yarn Spinning! Come spin a tale and be the storyteller you've always wanted to be. Or sit back and listen to others and cheer for your favorites.

Creating Believable Characters All good stories need good characters (furry and otherwise)! Come discuss heroes, villains, supporting characters, and everything in between.

PUPPETRY TRACK

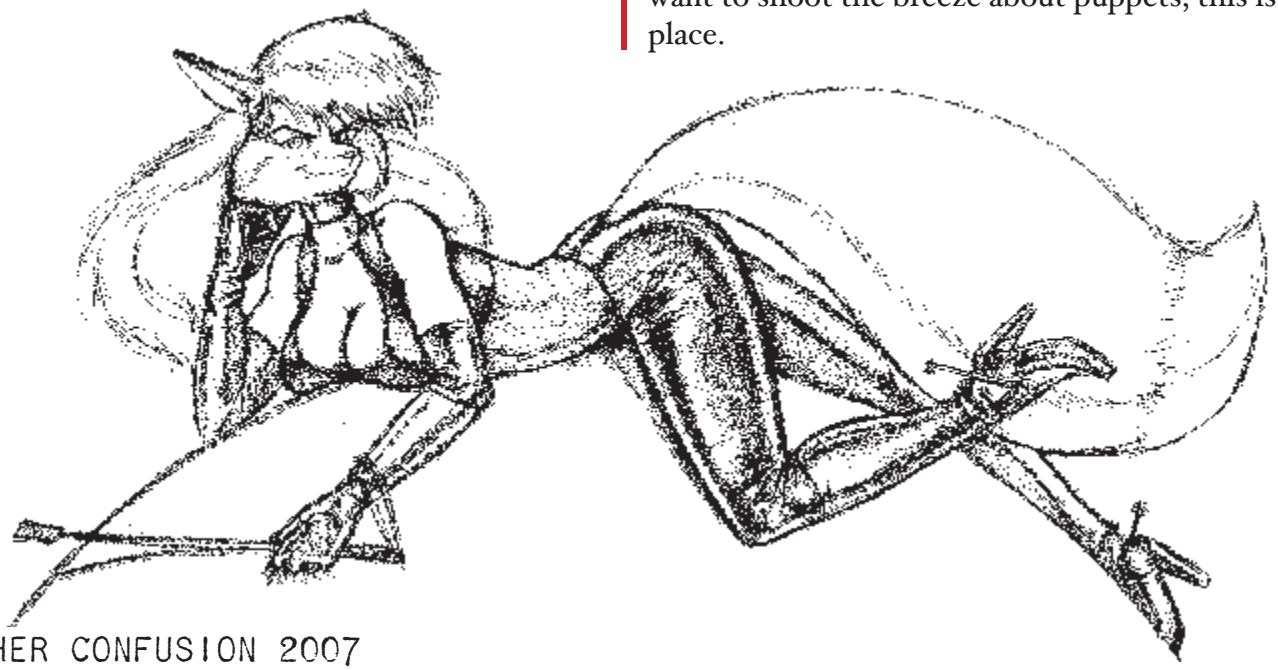
The Super Secret Top Secret Puppet Show Your mission, whether you accept it or not, is to provide mirth, mayhem, and merriment with puppet-based songs, sketches, and improvisations. Should you cause laughter-induced convulsions, we'll disavow any knowledge of your actions.

The Not-So-Secret Puppet Performance The usual zaniness continues with your help, because this show's for you! Audience participation is expected in this show of puppet madness, whether you like to perform, answer questions in our puppet-driven game shows, or just enjoy the hilarity of those crazy furry puppeteers.

Tips, Tricks, and Traps in Puppet Performance You have a puppet and want to use it. The question is, how? Join Akeakami and Treads Lightly from Pawpets North Coast and Tiresta from Swishy-tails Productions and let them show you how to get a handle on creating enjoyable puppet performances. Topics will include scripting, staging, and lighting.

A Puppet Is Born Puppets are small fursuits for your hand, and like their large counterparts, the question remains: "Build or buy?" Use this panel to explore how to buy, construct, or adapt a puppet and discover what works and what doesn't. You might find it's a lot of fun!

Puppet Discussion Roundtable A general open-table discussion of all things puppets. The floor is wide open for anything and everything puppetry here. So if you need information, help, or just want to shoot the breeze about puppets, this is your place.



GAMING TRACK

FMCL@FC Cribbage Tournament Join tournament director Genevive Fox for her annual FMCL cribbage tournament. Last year, she was so impressed with the tournament champion—she married him! Kenneth Fox is also back this year to defend his title. Join the Foxes for a Sunday afternoon of cards and pegs in the Gaming Room!

Intro to the Gaming Industry Join gaming industry insider Spaniard as he discusses the ins and outs of the industry, as well as tips to prepare yourself for a career and get your foot (paw) in the door!

Fur-1 in the Blank It's a furry throwback to the '70s! Join Sir Crimson Fox and his panel of furry celebrities—Tugrik of FurryMUCK, cartoonist John "The Gneech" Robey, FC2007 Con Chair Squirrel, puppeteer Steve Plunkett and Vixie, and others—for our version of the classic gameshow *Match Game*! You'll laugh your ___ off!

Who Wants to Be a Furrionaire? Milestones, lifelines, and trivia of all flavors . . . it's all here in "Who Wants to Be a Furrionaire?" Join trivia-mistress Genevive Fox as she poses that ultimate question . . . "Is that your *final* answer?"

***Super Smash Brothers: Melee* Tournament** Join Mario, Luigi, Bowser, Donkey Kong, Link, Zelda, and all your Nintendo favorites (including Fox McCloud, of course!) in a no-holds-barred fight for GameCube supremacy.

***Heroclix* Collectible Miniatures Game** Superheroes and supervillains do epic battle at Further Confusion—all on a tabletop! Bring your world-saving and world-destroying figurines and help determine who is the superest of the super!

Texas Hold 'Em Tournament Tables 1–6 Tables one through six of the FC'007 Texas Hold 'Em tournament. Winner advances to the final table Sunday night.

***Naruto: TCG* Tournament** Show off your best ninjutsu at our tournament for *Naruto: The Card Game.*

***Dance Dance Revolution* Tournament** Up! Left! Down and right! Dance the morning away in time with those pesky arrows as you show us your performance! It's quite possibly the most popular video game ever, and we celebrate it with this tournament. Just be sure to schedule time for a shower afterwards . . . it's a workout!

***Magic: The Gathering* Tournament** With over six million players worldwide, *Magic: The Gathering* is by far the most popular and recognizable collectible card game in existence. Further Confusion invites you to bring your deck and test your mettle against other wizards for furry supremacy.

Texas Hold 'Em Tournament (Final Table) Put your chips in the middle and pray your opponent doesn't have rockets. Texas Hold 'Em has become the most popular form of poker and one of the most popular card games in the world. Prove your skill, luck, and ability to lie like a dog (no offense, canines) as we crown FC's first Hold 'Em champion.

***Guitar Hero* Tournament** Come shred with me! Whether you can just barely make it through "Smoke on the Water" on medium, or you can rip through "Bark at the Moon" on expert, bring your star power to the Gaming Room on Sunday morning. And yes, our amps go to 11 too.

***Navia Dratp CMG* Tournament** It's like chess, but different. Hone your strategic planning in our *Navia Dratp* tournament Sunday afternoon.

***Yu-Gi-Oh! CCG* Tournament** Get your game on! Bring your Kuribohs, your elemental heroes, and dragons of all eye and scale colors! Send your duel monsters into battle. If you survive with your life points intact, you could be crowned king of games—or, at least, FC 2007 *Yu-Gi-Oh!* champion.

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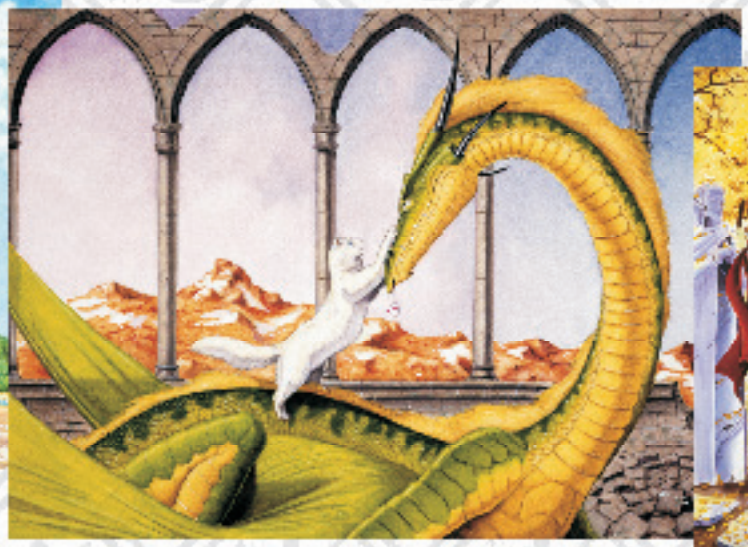

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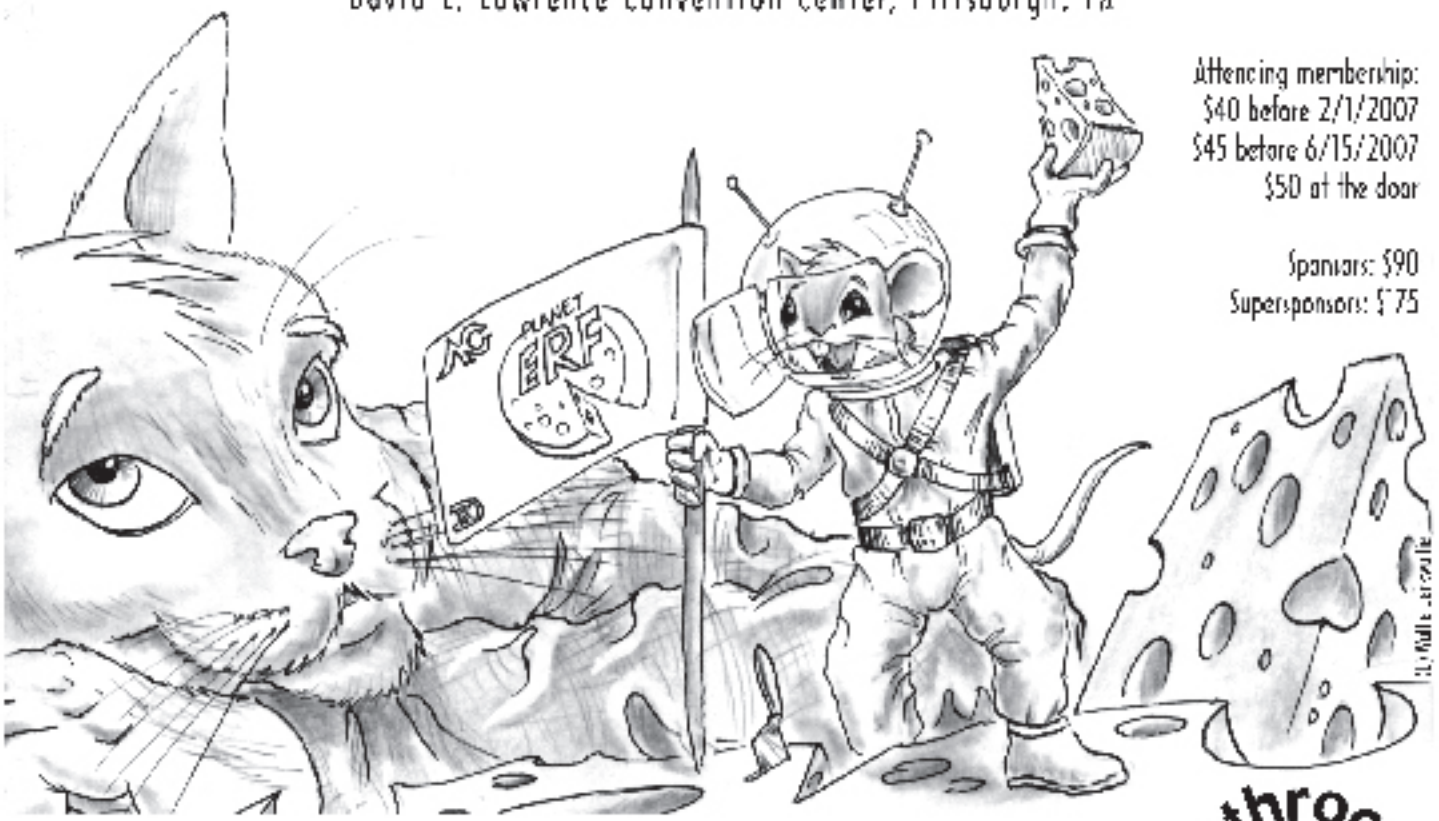

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MORALE

MATTHEW JOSEPH HARRINGTON

The spread of the new Kdaptism could only be checked by forcing Kdapt-Preacher to directly challenge the authority of Patriarch Ys-Chao-Rrit, as Kdapt-Preacher wasn't stupid enough to do that on his own. A Patriarch's Word was issued, granting amnesty to rebels who had been taking orders from those they had entrusted with their souls, and thenceforth restricting the authority of religious officials to giving orders only to their subordinates within the religious hierarchy. This effectively denied Kdapt-Preacher any secular power over his followers, and the only way to overturn a Patriarch's Word was to defeat the Patriarch in battle; so a challenge was issued, and Kdapt-Preacher was slain.

As the Patriarch's wounds were being tended, Supreme Priest Gubiteb called for Jotoki slaves to take Kdapt-Preacher's corpse to be incinerated.

"That order is canceled," declared Yth-Tender-of-Legends.

"By what authority?" demanded Gubiteb.

"By the fact, Holy One, that your own authority to give orders is limited to your own subordinates, by the Patriarch's Word, which the Fanged God has just upheld."

"That Word applies only to the heretics!" Gubiteb exclaimed.

Softly, Yth-Tender-of-Legends said, "It doesn't say so, Holy One." He addressed the slaves: "Cure the hide, then clean the eye and put it in a display case."

"They shouldn't touch the eye directly," said Gubiteb, who knew what kind of creature had built the thing. "It may be responsible for the change in his thinking."

"Thank you, Holy One. —Don't allow living tissue to come in contact with the eye."

Gubiteb, the only kzin who could lawfully tattoo his ears and tail black, was shrewd, adaptable, and far more self-controlled than was remotely normal for a kzin. He returned quietly to his quarters.

Which he then demolished.

He thought. There was a way to regain secular power within the law— a key consideration, given that the Blackfurs had always acted to increase Patriarchal authority, to expand their own. —Nobody could deny glory to a doer of deeds; and if the deeds were done in the Fanged God's Name, why, the recent Patriarch's Word would clearly not apply to its doers.

He had a ship. He had subordinates who could fight.

Soon he had a plan.

Few precautions were taken against interstellar piracy, mainly because it was considered impossible. Even if a ship could be tracked through hyperspace, there was no way to intercept it— all ships in hyperspace moved at the same speed. Uninhabited systems got no traffic worth considering, and in an inhabited system, ships in normal space would call for the police.

Unless, of course, they were smugglers.

Smugglers always emerged from hyperspace at obscure locations, readily monitored; and kzinti ships were designed for pursuit and intercept. Success followed success for years, and they stockpiled wealth and ate fresh food constantly.

The rest of the crew soon noticed that Gubiteb had one unexplained habit: before they boarded a ship, he always told a Jotoki slave:

"Bring me my purple robes."

He then wore them for the close combat. Eventually his most junior priestling, who had the least status to lose, asked if he might know the reason for this.

"Certainly," Gubiteb replied. "The Fanged God created us priests to stir the will to fight. As leader here, the burden of duty is greatest upon me. Therefore, the rest of you should not see me bleeding in battle, as it might dismay you; so I wear purple robes in case I am wounded. Purple blood isn't visible on purple robes."

Everyone appreciated this gesture, and they fought with renewed ferocity for many months after that.

There finally came a time when they attacked smugglers in the Gunpoint system one more time, and the entire Free Wunderland Conspiracy fleet attacked them.

It was a long time before they lost the last pursuer. They limped into an uncharted system, well beyond Known Space, to make repairs among the local asteroids.

The largest asteroid of the bunch was coming apart. They went to have a look, and found a ship running an automated mining operation. Wealth indeed. "Unidentified ship!" Gubiteb hailed it. "I am Gubiteb, this is the battleship *God's Teeth,* and we are kzinti. Prepare to be boarded."

Suddenly they were in free fall: the gravity planer had died. "Kzinti battleship," came the curiously-accented reply. "I am Leslie Martin, MD, this is the interceptor *Kevorkian,* and I am a human protector. The Fanged God had better get a straw."

Gubiteb knew what most kzinti did not: that one human protector had singlehandedly defeated the destroyer *Fury,* brought several of its crew back from the dead, turned most of them into pacifists and the last into Kdapt-Preacher, restored a poisoned human world to habitability, stolen the Patriarchy's entire store of military secrets, and essentially won the Fourth War all by itself— in the span of half a year.

He turned to his Jotoki slave and said:

"Bring me my brown leggings."

EVEN DOUBLE AGENTS NEED DAYS OFF

RENCHAN

Disguised as a bellhop, I slid into the room, carefully manipulating the cloth covered cage in my hands. Crouching down, my paws fumbled over the latch, wary of the inhabitants. Once it was opened, I backed up, leaving it on the floor.

From within slithered brightly striped snakes, creeping across the floor, giving each other the occasional lazy hiss.

With my task done, I turned to the door and someone cleared their throat.

A collie leaned against the doorframe of the bedroom, wrapped tightly in a complimentary bathrobe. Disheveled, his fur was slack, his eyes half open, ears barely perked, tail droopy. In hand was a bucket and booklet.

"Wow, you look terrible. Did one of them already bite you?"

The canine leveled a weak glare at me. "Get your scaly friends and go."

"Or what? You'll jump over here and dispatch me with your stylish kung fu maneuvers?"

"No," he croaked.

"Or use some sort of fancy gadgetry to slay me?"

"No."

"Then—"

Suddenly he stuck his head in the bucket and began roughly hiccupping. Immediately I felt queasy at the mere sound. Once he pulled his head back out, seeming to have had a false alarm, he wiped some drool off his lip. "I'm out of bounds."

"Out of bounds? Secret agents don't get specialty treatment!"

"Oh yeah?" He threw the booklet at my feet. "Read the circled portion."

Crouching down, I scooped up the manual—the *International Special Agent Handbook*—and glanced at the marked area.

Section 4, heading B, paragraph 6, subcategory twelve, labeled "Qualifications For Unallowable Threat":

"Operatives belonging to government and non-state organizations are hereby rendered untouchable under the following criteria: incapacitated due neither to their own actions nor the actions of enemy agents, at funerals, during celebration of religious holidays, or off-duty due to health."

"These non-state organizations—"

"Power-mad billionaires, insane individuals bent on world domination, terrorist operations, Greenpeace—"

"And if any of these organizations don't comply?" I asked with a sneer.

Dangerstein gestured at the little handbook. "Standard procedure."

Frowning, I said "Huh. Y'got me."

"Yeah, so get your pets and get out."

With resignation, I knelt down and coaxed the snakes back into their carrier. All except one, who was hiding under the couch, came willingly. "C'mon, Yancy, c'mere, tsh tsh tsh . . ."

The collie peered at me incredulously. "You named your snake . . . Yancy?"

"There something wrong with that?" I asked, ears laid back.

"No, unless you want the other snakes to laugh at him."

Yancy finally came out from under the couch, and I eased him carefully into the cage. At the door, I turned and pointed. "I will see to it personally, Graham Dangerstein, that you will suffer a death most gruesome! A fate that will be painful and have you begg—"

Dangerstein stuck his head back in the bucket and dry-heaved a bit. Finally, "Sorry, sorry. Avoid Thailand during flu season."

"No, quite all right," I assured, then continued. "Begging for your death!"

"And," asked the agent as he wiped his mouth, "Did I do to deserve such animosity? Single-handedly bringing the head of S.C.U.M.B.A.G. down?"

"No."

Graham flicked his tail. "Dispatching The Claw's front in Morocco?"

"No."

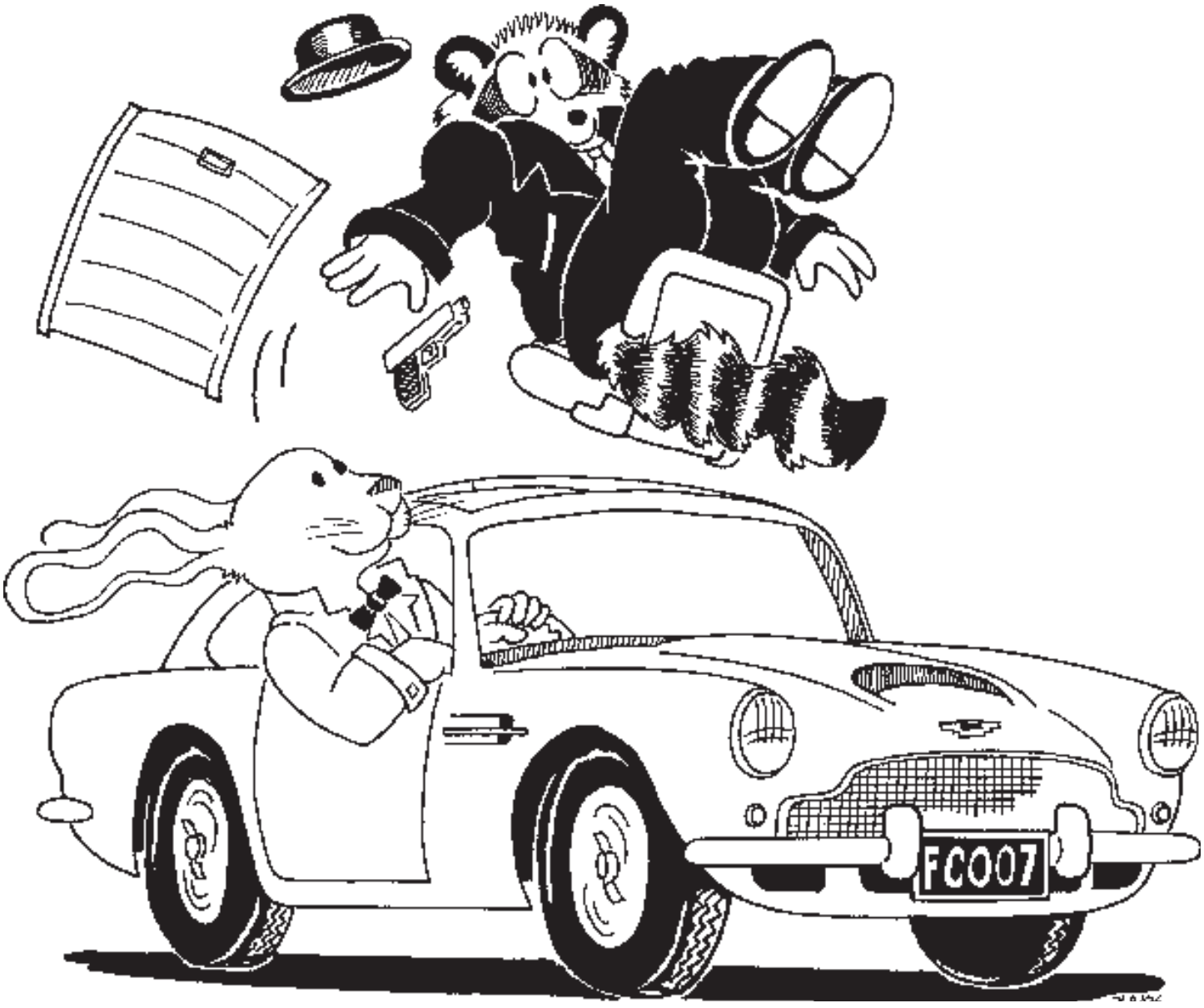
"Then what?"

"My grandfather's name was Yancy—he was a very respectable man!"

For a second, Dangerstein blinked. "Oh. Well, my apologies."

"All right then, score settled. Get well soon, so I can kill you."

"Will do," said the collie, as I slipped out.



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THE CRUCIBLE

KIM LIU

ILLUSTRATED BY DAVE BRYANT

Lyseen—listen! You weren't supposed to be the one to go on the run to Saris IV—this last-minute change has ruined everything," Itran had whispered in a rushed anxious voice in the dark base corridor. His ears had twitched at every little sound. "We need your help—your sister needs your help. Take this . . ."

. . . *and kill the pilot,* Lyseen thought to herself, looking at the sleeping form in the pilot's chair. The ceramic knife stashed in her tiny sleeping niche kept jumping into her mind, with its clean, sharp edge. The blade was fifteen centimeters of non-metallic light orange material, with a grip wrapped in non-slip red binding tape. It looked nothing like the knives used in the holovid shows she watched secretly as a cub—she wondered if his blood would look the same as on the shows.

With a shudder, she tried to turn her mind from that image, tried to quell the fluttering in her stomach. If at that moment the pilot woke up, he would see her with fur all a-bristle, tail lashing, and ears back. In that kind voice of his, he would ask her what was wrong—even be truly concerned—and then what could she answer?

The time display on the pilot console continued its flickering count, and other displays kept track of stellar alignments and hyperspace buoys. Lyseen still had three days before she would have to set a new course for the freighter, with the concealed cargo of weapons riding in back.

She would have to kill the pilot before then.

Four days ago, the task had seemed much more palatable. Lyseen had visited her sister in the makeshift medical area in the lower levels of the supply base, since real medical facilities were reserved for humans only, to see how she was doing. Her sister's brown fur laid smooth once more where once cuts and abrasions had marred it, but still lacked luster, as had her brown eyes.

Lyseen's more golden fur had contrasted with her sister's as she took her sister's hand in hers. "Lysanne, I'm here," she had whispered, and received no reaction from the limp form. "I . . . I'm going to have to go. I need to—I have to . . ." Lyseen had had to swallow and fight back her tears. "I'm going to try to stop it, Lysanne. I don't want this to happen any more.

"Please get better. I'm going to leave you a message for when you wake up—I'm not sure I will be back . . ."

"Or if I'll survive," Lyseen whispered as she turned and padded into the tiny galley on the freighter, failing to suppress a shudder along her spine. The stakes were higher than she had ever thought possible. Itran and his fellow concats—as people referred to the genetically engineered felines—had been conspiring for a long time, that she had known. The fact that they had been coordinating with other constructs on other planets, or that they had cracked the computer systems of the supply base so deeply, had been news to her.

Lyseen had been given only four hours notice that she was going to ship out as a "companion" on this cargo run instead of Natton. Itran had tried to explain everything to her about what was really going on in less than forty minutes of that time. The "accidental" switching of cargo modules on the ship at the supply base. The planned rebellion on the mining outpost on Iceward that was waiting for the weapons in the cargo modules. The situation explained had been more than she could comprehend easily, a whirlwind of planning and conspiracy, a portent of blood.

The concat paused by her sleeping niche in the galley and looked at her sleeping mat, but only saw the hidden knife in her head. Beyond the hatch to the cockpit, she could see the pilot. Carland Dranson was his name. The records listed him as a senior

pilot from the Core worlds. This far out on the frontier, the Core worlds were half mythical—a source of orders which were given only lip service by the supply base staff and news which had little relevance to the concats as they struggled with conditions of hard labor and abuse.

Carland had been different from the local pilots and crews, different from the crew of the local asteroid mining ship that her sister had been on the last time. He had smelled clean, and his uniform had been impeccable when Lyseen had first seen him. The supply base staff had resented him on sight for some reason that Lyseen could not understand, and on his part he had concealed some contempt, or perhaps distaste, for the base staff in return, yet had never acted less than polite—even to the concats he had met.

Even to Lyseen.

Lyseen was no stranger to these cargo runs. Some pilots were gentler than others, though she had received her share of bruises and beatings before as well. As they were repeatedly reminded, the concats were servants. Lesser. The tallest concat she had ever seen had only stood one point six some meters tall when he straightened, instead of standing crouched over normally on the digitigrade legs the concats possessed. All were light of build, with provably smaller brain cases than humans, and the humans never let them forget it. The concats were made to serve them.

This human, though, even if he felt the same, was polite. His constant use of "'Please" and "Thank you" kept her looking around to see who he was talking to before she would realize it was her. He had not laid a hand on her once in the past four days—hardly touched her in fact. Once he had even helped her clean up when she had dropped a tray.

Are all the humans from the Core like this? she wondered to herself as she curled up in her sleeping niche. Her tail flicked restlessly.

The hardness of the knife poked her through the thin sleeping mat.

"When hes sleeping, just take the knife, walk up to him, and cut his throat,'" Itran had said.

It had sounded simple enough. If it had been one of the crew from her sister's last trip, she would not have hesitated.

A little nagging thought asked her, *Would you?*

Lyseen closed her eyes, frowning, and fell into a troubled sleep.

The next morning by ship time, the pilot was still asleep, though he had moved to the bunk in his cabin. He had been spending the trip going over files and reports and writing new files and reports, and spending late hours doing such. Lyseen looked at the displays: two days and eight hours left. With a shudder, she turned away and went back to the galley. After cleaning and changing to a fresh uniform, the concat started breakfast. Carland was normally up early, but she doubted he would sleep any later than regulations permitted—unlike other humans, he seemed to take the regulations seriously.

Carland looked bemused when he woke to find breakfast ready for him. "Just like back home," he commented in a gruff voice that was surprisingly deep for his build. Fleet records said that he was one point seven four meters tall, though Lyseen thought him closer to one point seven seven. The records also said he had sea-green eyes, a color which Lyseen had never before seen in an official record description. The brown hair matched the records, though. He looked surprised as he sipped at the coffee. "You made this?"

Lyseen nodded. "Yes sir," she murmured, eyes down. "Is something wrong, sir?"

"It tastes just like I make it—it normally takes people days to get the hang of it," he commented, tasting his drink again. "It's why I usually make it myself."

"I won't do it again, sir."

Carland looked at her oddly. "No, no! This is very good. Thank you."

"You're welcome, sir."

For the next few hours until lunch, Lyseen attended to routine maintenance and housekeeping tasks aboard the ship, such as laundry and cleaning. She acted more carefully about some of the ship maintenance—Carland had reprimanded her for replacing some of the air filters in the life support system. Technically, the regulations forbade any concat to be working on the life-support systems, but most of the humans she had shipped with had been too lazy or unwilling to get down on their hands and knees and clean out the dirt and gunk that gathered.

The human groaned and rubbed his head as she approached with lunch. Printouts lay scattered across the pilot console (which Lyseen noted to herself was technically a regulation breach.) "The numbers don't add up," he muttered. "It doesn't make any sense. Where are they managing to boost production so far without matching costs?" The pilot shook his head, then looked up as Lyseen came up to him. "Ah, lunch. Thank you, Lyseen." He took the tray from her and settled it onto the matching slots on his chair, then checked the time. "At exactly the official proper time, again. You do an excellent job." The time and date was noted into the ship's log as he closed and sealed his working files.

"Thank you, sir."

"In fact, for the past two days you've had dinner and lunch ready at the exact proper time, down to the second." Carland looked up from the ship's log and studied her in a way that made her nervous. "That's fairly remarkable."

"Sir?"

"Nothing."

Lyseen worried the rest of that afternoon. What had she done wrong? Standard ship regulations specified the proper times for meals, rest, and duties. The pilot was very serious about following regulations (except those regarding loose paper printouts)—she could not see what she had done improperly. Meals served at regulation times had to be what he wanted—left up to himself, that was when he prepared his own breakfasts and meals. Despite her concern, she prepared dinner on schedule.

Carland looked bemused again at her timing, but made no comment this time. "Thank you, Lyseen." He stretched and set aside another stack of reports. "Perhaps you can help me with this problem—goodness knows I can't solve it."

"You are welcome, sir. I am just a concat, sir, I doubt I can solve something you cannot," Lyseen murmured.

"Hmph." Carland snorted as he turned to dinner. "Why don't I believe you?"

A look of sudden panic leaped onto the concat's face. "Sir? Have I said something wrong?" Lyseen shook as she kneeled beside the pilot's chair. "Correct me, please."

"Novas! Stand up, damnit—I was just joking!" He stared at her.

"Yes sir." Lyseen got back to her feet quickly, unable to hide a trembling in her tail.

"Something is wrong here," the pilot muttered, staring at her intently.

Lyseen started trembling. *He knows!* she thought to herself. *What am I going to do?*

"Stop that—I'm not going to hurt you. . . ." He paused, looking at her eyes. "You've heard that before, haven't you?"

"Yes sir," she whispered, looking down at the deck.

"Look at me," Carland ordered, and her brown eyes jerked up to meet his sea green ones. "Damn, but you're scared. . . . How many times have you heard that phrase before, I wonder?"

"One hundred thirty-two, sir," Lyseen answered automatically, almost shaking now.

"What?" The human nearly choked. "You're kidding! No, you're too scared to kid—calm down! I'm not going . . . oh, damn it. Look, I want you to take thirty deep breaths, and calm down, you understand me?"

"Y-yes sir. . . ." Lyseen shivered still but obeyed. She calmed down some, but he could see that she was still frightened.

Carland ran a hand through his hair as if he would like to pull some of it out. "There's something seriously wrong at that supply base."

Lyseen nearly fainted. *He knows!* Her ears paled.

"Who told you that they wouldn't hurt you last?" Carland asked, turning the chair around to face her.

"I-I don't know, sir!"

The pilot narrowed his eyes and bit back irritated words. She could see him thinking, and it frightened her. This wasn't like any other human she had been with. The others had hurt her or abused her, but this one—he was dangerous to her. Lyseen couldn't explain why, but she was more terrified now than she had ever been before.

The human pulled out his ID card and slid it into the ship's console, then pressed the log command. "Log entry, as of this time stamp and date, I, Carlton Windsor, Senior Investigative Agent, Level Ten, Division Three, Fleet Internal Affairs, extend full protection of this agency to construct category seven, female, name Lyseen, assigned to this ves-

sel, pending full investigation of practices on supply base gamma gamma nine five, under the powers granted to me. Computer: burn to permanent ship's log." Carlton turned and looked at her again. "Do you understand what that means?"

Lyseen's mind went blank. Fleet Internal Affairs? That was almost a myth out here. Senior Investigative Agent, Level 10? Her mind raced through unused memories. That made him senior to almost all staff on the supply base. Why was he pretending to be a pilot? He had to know about Itran and the plans! From a distance, she felt herself nod jerkily in response.

"Lyseen—I am ordering you to ignore any commands, orders, or threats that have been made to keep you from telling me what I want to know," Carlton said carefully, watching the concat—who was by far the most frightened thing he had ever seen living without having a stroke. "I want to know the exact identities of the people who told you they would not hurt you, and then did."

"Senior Engineer Almoran Del Targo, Fleet nuining ship *Goldrush,* serial number 9801-22-38711-2. Shuttle pilot Julious J. Fontain, supply base gamma gamma nine five, serial number 7315-68-397123," she whispered, dredging up the memories and trying not to flinch as she re-lived each one. "Scanner tech Liana Johannson, Fleet prospector *Long View,* serial—"

"Stop." Carlton stared at her again. "Perfect memory?" he muttered to himself. "Category sevens aren't . . . Lyseen—what's Fleet regulation . . . oh . . . 4.55.69 section 38 cover?"

"Regulation 4.55.69 section 38: During parade and ceremonial functions in inclement conditions, regulation 4.55.69 section 31 regarding required dress codes for all Fleet personnel may be waived for the following—"

"Stop," Carlton half-whispered at her, looking disturbed. "How long ago did you learn the full Fleet regulations, Lyseen, not just the minimal set?"

Lyseen's digitigrade legs looked ready to give way underneath her. The conversation was completely beyond her, and the look of terror she had before was returning ten-fold. "Eight years, one hundred thirty-three days, sir," she said hoarsely, ears pressed tight to her skull.

Carlton leaned forward in the pilot's chair and peered hard into her eyes. "How old are you, Lyseen? Don't look away from me."

"Forty-six years old, sir."

"That's not true. You don't have the marks of age in your eyes or skin or fur. Tell me the age you are not supposed to say."

Lyseen swallowed. "S-seventeen years, sir."

The human's breath hissed out of him. "What was your birth creche?"

"Gene-Star facility 0221, on Tellion 11, sir."

"Your real birth creche."

"Sir?"

"Your birth creche? What facility were you raised in?"

The concat looked confused again. "Supply base gamma gamma nine five, sir."

Carlton could feel the hair prickling on his neck. "What? That base doesn't have the cloning facilities to produce . . . no, it couldn't be!" He paled to ashen. "Were you . . . born, Lyseen?"

The concat nodded.

Carlton started to shake as much as or more so than she had. "Constructs . . . constructs are not supposed to be fertile . . . making fertile constructs is a class A offense . . . under Alliance law." He swallowed. "Do you know Alliance law?"

She shook her head. "N-no sir."

"Small favors." The human tried to sit up straight again and stared at the reports printed out around him. "It . . . it makes sense now," he whispered. "The bio-mass requisition rates, the mine production increases without matching labor requisitions, but the life support needs haven't been changing. . . ." He looked at her again. "What . . . what is the average life span of a concat out here?"

"Twenty-six point three years, sir, for females, twenty point nine for males."

"And you're named Lyseen to replace the original Lyseen from creche 0221," Carlton said softly. "Oh my God. They're working you to death in the mines to increase profits and breeding replacements to cut costs and hide it." Lyseen had not thought he could become much paler. "We'd heard reports of mistreatment, but this . . . novas! It must go straight nearly to the top . . . how could we have missed this for so long?" He stared out at the stars. "It can't just be one base . . . oh God." Carlton looked down at his tray.

"I can't eat now. I need to think. The nearest Fleet base is . . . Hell! Who could I trust? I need to plot a course. . . ." He tossed the reports sitting on the navigation console to the deck and started madly reviewing the nearest destinations. "We've got to get you and the other concats out of this mess. You're not supposed to be treated like . . . like this!"

This time he did tear at his hair. "I was supposed to be out here to investigate mistreatment reports—we're still arguing about the whole idea of a servant race, of making a race to be nothing but servants—but this . . . this is monstrous!" Carlton tried to smile reassuringly. "Don't worry, Lyseen . . . we'll protect you—all of you," he said, though his voice shook, and then turned to his course calculations.

Lyseen quietly picked up the dinner tray, somehow managing not to drop it, and returned to the galley. She very carefully disposed of the uneaten meal, cleaned and stowed the utensils, then collapsed into a shaking heap in her sleeping niche. Her mind spun madly. Carlton didn't have any idea about Itran's plans, or did he? Class A offense? Fertility? The concat clutched her tail to her chest and shivered.

Carlton wanted to change course. Lyseen couldn't let him do that. Carlton said he wanted to protect her, the concats . . . her sister. Lyseen believed him—after years of abuse she had learned to tell when a human was lying, on purpose or to themselves. She believed him. What about his superiors, though? He seemed shaken and unsure.

The hard lump of the knife poked her still through the sleeping mat, reminding her. Lyseen clenched her eyes tight. The weapons sitting in the cargo modules. If Carlton took the ship to a Fleet base and they found those. . . . Weapons smuggling was a serious offense under Fleet regulations. . . . Fertility was a class A offense under Alliance law . . . her mind unerringly found the matching Fleet regulations concerning offenses. The only Fleet offense she remembered which mentioned class A offenses under Alliance law was . . . treason. The penalties were selective mind-wipe or death.

No one had developed a mind-wipe for concats.

Her sister.

A tiny whine or scream tried to come from Lyseen's throat, but she throttled it down to a whimper as she tried to think. Carlton wasn't just a pilot, he was from Fleet Internal Affairs—a pilot that was overdue at Saris IV was one thing, but what if someone was waiting for him? Saris IV might be alerted. . . . What would Carlton do once he found the weapons? Itran and the other concats were waiting on them . . . to start a rebellion. Rebellion was treason. Treason was death.

Lyseen found herself standing, looking dully at the orange and red knife held in both hands. She had to kill Carlton, but she couldn't do it. Not now. Maybe she never would have been able to. She had failed.

Eyes closed, she raised the knife to her chest. "Goodbye, Lysanne," she whispered and tensed her arms, barely hearing the galley door open.

"I'm going to change cour . . . Lyseen! Stop!"

The concat reflexively froze for a moment at the command, then let out a sob and jerked the knife towards her chest. Hands grabbed at hers, stopping her attempt and trying to wrestle the knife away. "Let me go!" Lyseen moaned as she struggled with the larger human and was nearly jerked off her feet as he yanked at the knife.

Carlton swore as he fought to get the weapon from the concat—she had a death grip on the knife that surprised him with its strength. The despair in her voice was beyond anything he had heard from anyone, human or construct, and chilling with its certainty. "What . . . is . . . wrong?!" he demanded between clenched teeth. Category sevens were not supposed to be as strong as he found Lyseen, and that chilled him as well. His fingers tore at hers but her fur defied a strong enough grip to get the knife away. "Forgive me," he grated as he half swung, half threw her against the bulkhead.

"Everything!" Lyseen howled before her back slammed into the galley wall. The impact drove her breath from her, but barely loosened her grip at all—this was not the first time she had been so treated. The human swore at her and tried again, and made her whimper in pain. On the third time her head cracked against the metal, and she felt herself weaken. The concat knew she couldn't let him stop her or let him question her more, and her digitigrade legs kicked out at the wall at the next swing.

"Damnit!" Carlton felt himself falling backward

as Lyseen lurched off the wall at him. With her half on top of him and his hands clenched on hers he couldn't stop himself. The small of his back cracked into the galley counter, and then his head slammed into one of the overhanging cabinets. *This isn't how it was supposed to work,* he thought dazedly as he toppled forward onto the concat. *An investigator is not supposed to lose to a cat seven . . .*

Then the searing pain entered his stomach.

Lyseen whimpered as the pilot fell on top and one of her legs twisted in pain as the human's greater weight pinned her, but his grip on her hands loosened suddenly. "Let me go!"" she pleaded before she jerked at the knife.

The human gasped and groaned at the jerk, and his eyes rolled back in his head.

Lyseen felt her hands become wet. "Oh no," she whispered.

Carlton did not want to wake up. The pain in his abdomen was most unpleasant, but the alarm bells in his head were growing more insistent until he could ignore them no longer and opened his eyes.

Kneeling beside the computer-controlled medical facility was the most pitiful, ragged-looking concat he had ever seen. Her gray uniform and her golden fur were splattered with blood, which he vaguely recognized as his. Where it was not matted with blood, her fur was ragged and standing out in all directions and her tail quivered like it was being electrocuted. Though her brown eyes, staring blankly at the wall above the medicomp bunk, were what moved—or perhaps frightened—him the most. There was more fear and despair in those two eyes than entire worlds could hold. "Lyseen," he rasped.

The concat stared dully at him. "Yes sir." Her voice was like that of the ship's computer, pleasant, feminine, and with no trace of personality.

The investigator in Carlton asserted itself even over the sympathy he felt for the sight in front of him. "Where did you get the knife?"

"It was given to me on supply base gamma gamma nine five, sir." Flat.

"But why . . ." Carlton's voice trailed off as he worked it out. The concat did not bring the knife on board to kill herself—that reason made no sense. The concat brought the knife on board to . . . kill him. The realization sent ice through his veins. He swallowed with a now dry mouth. "How bad is the wound?"

"The medical computer reports your intestines, liver, and right kidney are damaged, sir. It is doing what it can, but estimates that you will go into a coma or shock from toxins in your blood in a few hours.

"Then you will probably die within a day, sir, as the on-board medical supplies run out."

Carlton had to suppress an urge to laugh madly at the thought of being killed out on this tiny freighter in the middle of nowhere by this concat, after surviving a decade of field work on the darker places of the Core worlds. "Well, isn't that just lovely!"

"Yes sir."

"Don't 'Yes sir' me!" he shouted hoarsely, then regretted it instantly as the concat withered in front of him. "Lyseen . . . look, there has to be something we can do."

The concat went back to staring at the wall. "Regulation 4.103.54 section 12: If the lives of the crew are in danger, the captain may authorize jettisoning of cargo, fuel, or non-essentials in order to make full use of emergency speed," she recited emptily. "The ship computer estimates a thirty-hour return trip if full emergency speed is used after cargo jettison. The medical computer estimates you have a 45% chance of surviving. You must authorize this, sir."

Carlton felt a surge of hope, for a moment. "Oh, hell! If I go back to that base like this, and they realize I'm from Internal Affairs—they'll kill me." The thought came to him that the base personnel probably already had realized this, and had given the knife to the concat and ordered her to kill him—a concat murdering an Internal Affairs agent sent out to investigate concat abuse would certainly confuse the investigations. One arm twitched in response to his desire to pull at his hair, but the pain stopped him. "Wait a minute! The cargo has medical supplies in it—we can use those!"

A flicker of fear showed in the concat's eyes. "There are no medical supplies in the cargo that can be used, sir."

"Of course there are! Cargo module three contains six complete advanced medical computers

with surgery equipment."

"There are no medical supplies in the cargo that can be used, sir."

"The hell there aren't! Then what's in cargo module three?"

"Five hundred mark IV infantry combat rifles scheduled for destruction on Highland II. One thousand two hundred mark IV energy packs scheduled to be recycled on Highland II. One hundred fifty advanced combat scopes for the mark III infantry combat rifle scheduled to be sold as surplus. Sir."

The human's lips moved but no sounds came out for several moments. "Cargo module eight has . . . ?"

"Four hundred twenty-five illegally manufactured civilian pistols scheduled for shipment to Rainstar Station for evidence in smuggling charges. Ten thousand rounds estimated ammunition for the same. Sir. The captured manufacturing equipment is in modules seven and six."

Carlton licked his lips. He wanted to jump up and grab this concat and call her a liar, because if someone was smuggling weapons, all the evidence pointed to . . . "You. You are. The knife. Why, Lyseen?"

A sob wrenched itself from the concat. "My sister," she moaned and clenched her eyes shut. "My sister . . . too many beatings. She won't talk now, won't move." Tears trickled down her face, fell to her bloodstained fists. "I just want it all to stop. They killed Mother in the mines. Riathe was run down for fun on Nerid III.

"They're going to shut down the mines on Iceward—just the humans are going to leave, and they're going to turn off the life-support systems. Itran wants to kill all the humans there. I just want it to stop." Lyseen sobbed freely now, slowly collapsing to the floor.

Carlton felt his heart freeze. The concats were planning a rebellion.

The constructs that were genetically created to serve and be obedient, to be helpers were planning . . . war. They should not have been capable of even thinking about violence, much less carrying it out, but his wound proved otherwise. "Who is Itran, exactly, Lyseen?"

"Itran," Lyseen whimpered. "Serial number CC-5-081233112. My cousin. He gave me the knife and . . ."

"Stop!" The human tried to control his shaking. CC-5 meant category five. "He is your cousin, by blood?"

"Yes sir."

Category fives were cloned and trained for heavy labor, with strength over intelligence. Category sevens were for household help and cleaning, with intelligence over strength. Category fours were little more than bright guard dogs or beasts of burden. Category sixes, never produced, had been the designation for a guardian type. Category eight and nine were just hypothetical designs. Category fives and sevens were cross breeding—not that they were ever meant to breed at all.

"They've put you into the crucible," he whispered. Carlton saw it now. Someone in the past must have realized that breeding concats was cheaper than shipping them from the clone facilities at the birth creches. By letting them reproduce, they could afford to push them harder to the point of death in order to increase production. "They aren't keeping tabs on your identities, because such records might show when concats were killed and replaced." The concats were breeding on the frontier—having children—unsupervised, untracked. "You can't have had the schooling of a birth creche to learn regulations, the category fives wouldn't have had the training on the mining equipment—who teaches you?"

"W-we teach each other, sir," Lyseen whispered back, still crying.

"Like oral histories . . . you've learned or developed your memory skills because you have to learn." Carlton closed his eyes. Concats with the strength of a category five, the intelligence of a seven, and with a memory only dreamed about for category nines. Concats who had been put in the furnace and had been tempering out on the frontier for decades.

And had finally had enough.

"Do you know what will happen when this gets out?" he asked hoarsely. "The frontier will explode!" His eyes snapped open and stared at the ceiling. "The Alliance government will demand the frontier concats be destroyed, probably pushed by people to hide their own involvement and from sheer fear. The frontier worlds will protest because if they are do-

ing this, they must be heavily dependent on forced concat labor to compete with the Core worlds economically. The investigations into how this has managed to be hidden for so long will shake the Alliance government to its roots. The concats . . . you . . . will probably try to fight. . . . If the Alliance bans all concats out of fear, the economic impact alone . . .” Carlton sounded amazed by his own conclusions. “Hellfire. This could shatter the entire Alliance!”

“Yes sir,” Lyseen said dully. “I know. We’ll all be killed.” She dragged herself to her feet. “The medical computer recommends against your normal meal, sir, but it is lunch time. Would you like to eat, sir?”

“Eat?” The human stared at her, at the surreal question. This concat was the center of a storm that no one had seen coming, and the fact that she was still trying to serve him lunch was mind-boggling. “Of course,” he murmured to himself. The concats were genetically designed to serve, and many of them would probably have still been quite happy to, but they had been pushed too far. They were probably not blood-thirsty or wanting vengeance . . . they just wanted not to be abused or thrown away. In their situation the thought of asking for help, and actually getting any, probably never crossed their minds.

Could he fault them for that? For any of this? “Lyseen . . . come here. Sit down. Please, tell me about these weapons . . . about everything.”

The human’s fingers stroked the fur on the back of Lyseen’s arm loosely as she sat beside him. “Soft,” he mumbled, eyes barely open. “Used to have a cat on Earth, with fur like this.”

Carlton had been growing increasingly incoherent and unfocused in the past hour. The medical computer was warning against the exertion he was making talking to her. “Please sleep, sir,” she murmured.

In her other hand she clutched his ID card. He had given her the two-thousand-letter long code to use it without him, commenting wryly that he had wished he had had her memory when he had had to learn it. With that code, she could use his access level, an Internal Affairs level 10 investigator, to override many Fleet and Alliance computers.

Lyseen could use it to activate the ship’s self-destruct, and just end it all.

Lyseen could use it to override the cargo locks and jettison the cargo modules, and use emergency engine power. She would just have to add the course back to base gamma gamma nine five, and maybe she could save the human’s life.

Lyseen could make the course change to Iceward and deliver the weapons. Carlton would die. Course corrections did not require the override, but the plan Carlton had suggested to her . . .

The concat curled up into a tight ball beside the medical computer bunk and clutched her tail to herself along with the ID card. Carlton suggested to her that she use his ID card and override authority to seal the mining colony on Iceward. By overriding the life-support systems for the human living quarters, he said that she could force a surrender, maybe, without bloodshed and fighting.

“You can . . . take control of it,” Carlton had wheezed, looking pale. “The war that’s going to happen. With you bringing in the weapons, with my card, you can make . . . your people listen to you. Minimize the blood and fighting—try to lead them to a peace. If you start killing civilians, everyone will turn their hands against you. You’ll have to be strong, or we . . . humans won’t believe you if you say you’ll fight if they don’t listen to your needs.”

The human stopped moving and his breathing settled into a shallow pace. Lyseen pulled herself to her feet once more, looking down at the white face before turning away. Passing through the galley to the cockpit, she bent down to pick up the orange and red and blood-stained knife. Even in her hand it seemed like such a distant thing, as was the ID card in her other hand. The pilot’s chair seemed to loom around her as she pulled herself up into the seat.

The ship’s clock kept the time indifferently as it counted down.

“What should I do, someone tell me!” she shrieked at the controls and burst into tears again. “I just wanted my sister to be better, to be safe! I didn’t want to kill anyone!” The pommel of the knife slammed repeatedly into the armrest of the pilot’s chair. “I don’t want to kill anyone! I don’t want war . . . I don’t want to lead . . .” Lyseen felt the tears run down her face as she screamed at the night. Carlton had told her that if she followed his suggestion, she’d have to be ready to kill, human or concat, and

be able to do it, to maintain control. Power. Authority. To make people listen when she asked for peace. To make such a peace happen.

The edges of the ID card and the handle of the knife dug into her palms as she clenched her hands. With effort, she forced herself to look at both of them. Lyseen thought about her sister, her cousin, about the situation on Iceward, about Carlton, and about herself.

The concat thought about the future. "I want . . ." She shuddered in the pilot's chair, ignoring the pinch of her tail in a seat meant for humans only.

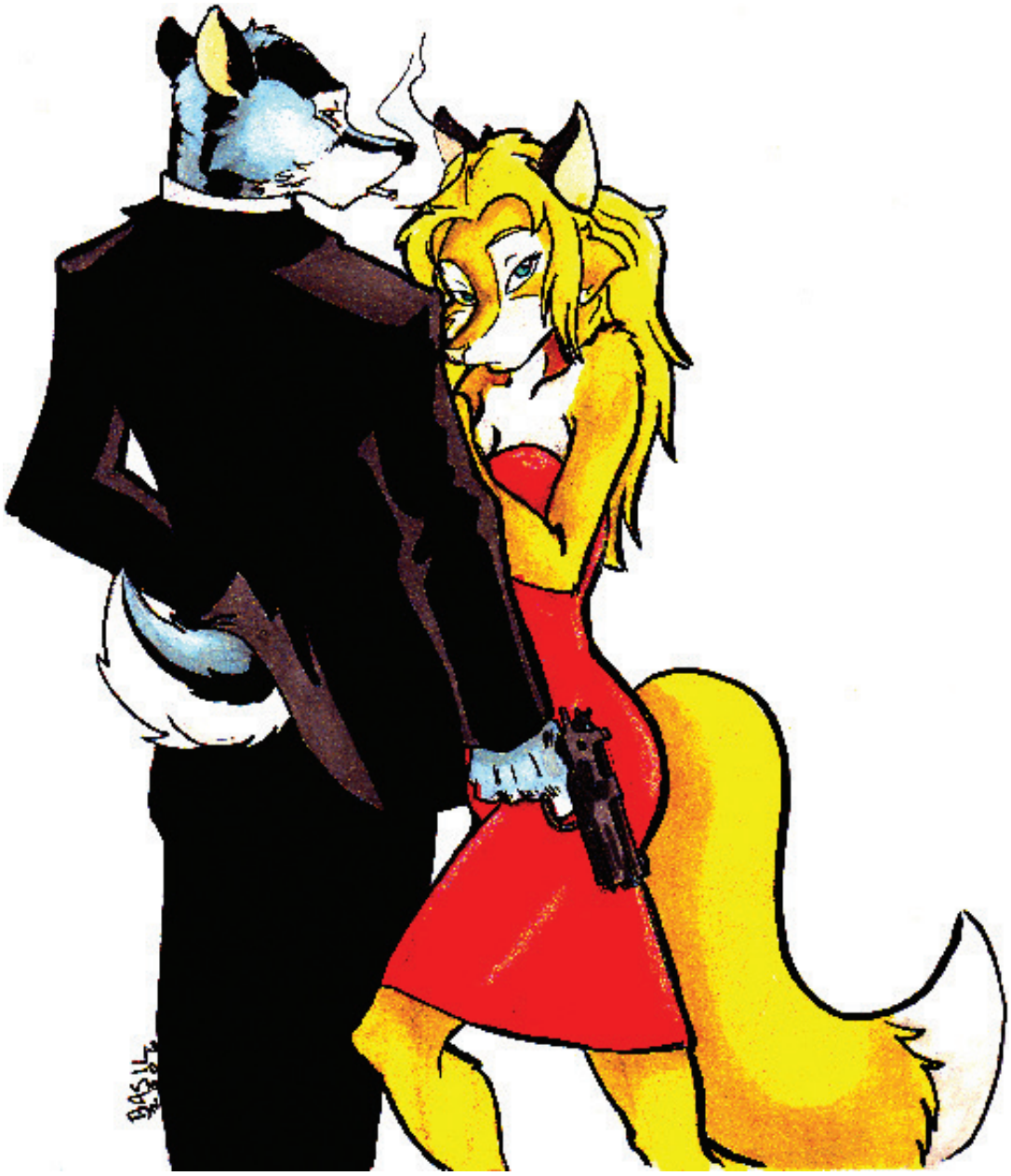
One final sob escaped Lyseen as she leaned forward to enter the course she had decided on. The computer beeped at her obediently as it accepted the course correction and began adjusting. Under her gaze, the stars drifted across the displays as the ship turned under her control.

Soon she would go back and listen to Carlton breathe his last, as her first victim.

Then she would prepare herself for the fires of war, for herself, for her sister . . . for everyone.

Lyseen would have to be strong.

"The Crucible" originally appeared in Anthrolations *issue three and in* Best of Show, *both published by Sofawolf Press.*



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A LETTER FROM THE BOARD

Welcome again to Further Confusion. The board of Anthropomorphic Arts and Education, the parent corporation of Further Confusion, hopes that each one of you has a fantastic convention. We always reserve a little space in the convention book to communicate with you all directly rather than through the awesome crew that runs FC each year.

This year marks our ninth FC, and that means the big tenth anniversary is next year. We hope to celebrate that with you all. It's been a long road since the first FurCon in 1999, when we had 691 folks attend. Never in our wildest dreams did we believe that it would grow to be over 2000 attendees—much less that it would do so in less than ten years. That's a tribute to all the wonderful folks who make up this community, and to the value each and every one of us assigns to it. Furry fandom is by far the most participatory group that we have ever seen, and that's a truly great thing. It makes all the hard work worthwhile. As long as that community and its participation exist, we hope to be a part of it.

With the extraordinary growth comes growing pains. The board of directors wants everyone to know that we realize we are on the very brink of completely outgrowing our current hotel in both hotel rooms and event space. We are committed to the Doubletree for FC 2008, but after that, they and we know that, if our growth continues, we will have to seek larger accommodations. Over the course of the next year, we'll be asking our community for guidance on the possible directions and trade-offs that will help us decide the best course to chart. Please take the time to give us that input.

Many thanks and see ya at the big 10.0.

Sincerely yours,
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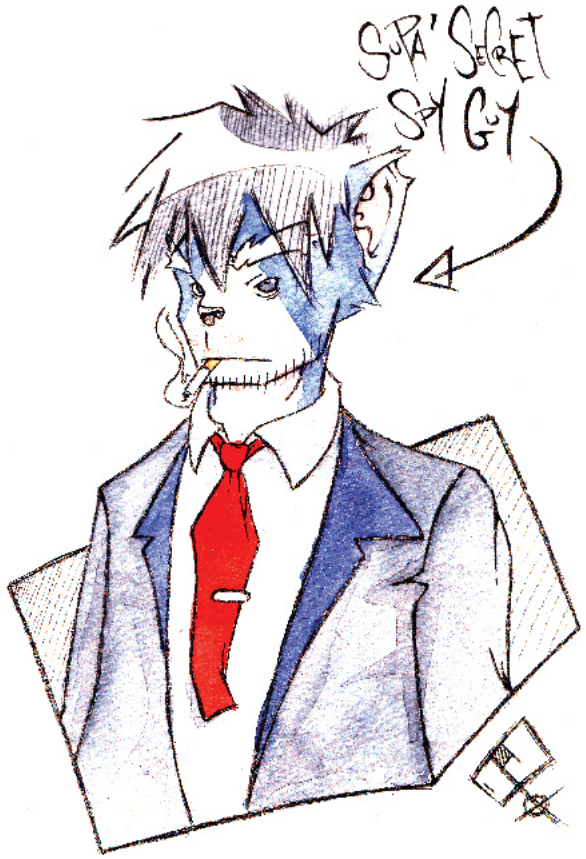

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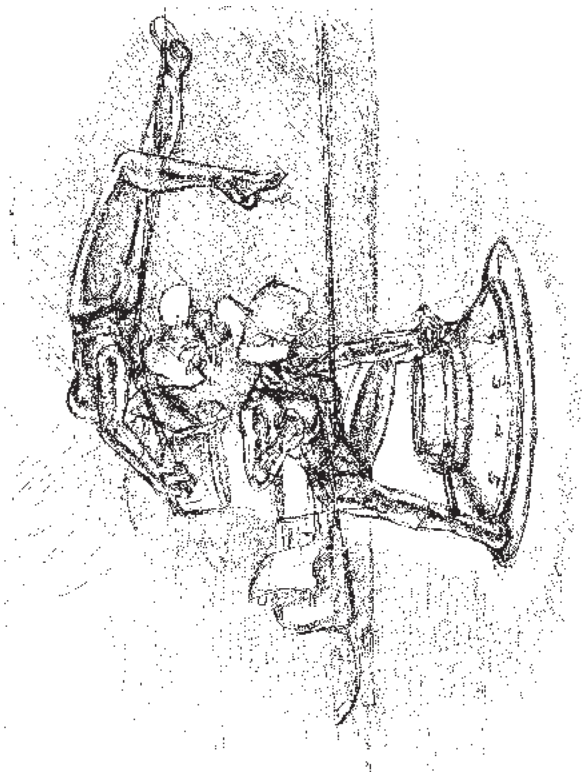

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